2025

RUTHLESS MIGHT

Essays on greed, technology, and global control

SYED SALMAN MEHDI

2025

RUTHLESS MIGHT

Essays on greed, technology, and global control

SYED SALMAN MEHDI

© Copyright & Publication Rights

© 2025 **Syed Salman Mehdi**
All rights reserved.

This book is the original intellectual work of **Syed Salman Mehdi**, a freelance writer and independent publisher. All articles and writings contained within were authored and published online between **December 2024 and September 2025**, and are freely available for public reading with their original links, citations, and references.

The author declares that none of these works have been sold, licensed, or transferred to any third party, publisher, or media organisation. All writings were produced and shared independently, without commercial intent, for awareness, education, and critical reflection.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, or transmitted in any form — electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise — without prior written consent from the author at **salmanmehdi128@gmail.com**

💔 Dedication

All this is not merely the result of sleepless nights —
it carries the blood of my heart and the voice of my soul.

These pages contain grief, anger, and protest against oppression.
They are a lamentation for the voiceless, a cry for justice,
a mirror to the heartbreaking realities of our time.

Within these words echo the cries of **Gaza**,
the starving children of **Sudan**,
the wounded economy and silent despair of **Pakistan**,
the unheard suffering of **Balochistan** and **Bajaur**,
and the unending search of parents in **Sindh**
for their missing sons and daughters.

It holds the anguish of journalists who fell in the line of truth,
the frustration of the people,
and the reflections of a nation torn between hope and helplessness.

This book carries my **blood, my tears, and my voice** —
an offering born from sorrow and resistance,

and a vision for a future where humanity rediscovers its conscience.

If I must dedicate it,
let it be to **the oppressed**,
to the **children of Gaza**,
and to the **truth-tellers** —
the journalists who were martyred for speaking
what others feared to whisper.

— *Syed Salman Mehdi*

Preface

In the labyrinth of our modern world, where borders blur and crises echo across continents, understanding the intricate threads of politics, economy, society, and human suffering is not merely an intellectual pursuit—it is a moral imperative.

This anthology, ***Echoes of Struggle: Dispatches from a Fractured World***, compiles my writings from December 2024 to September 2025, originally published in platforms such as *Global Voices*, *Paradigm Shift*, *HumSub*, *Dissident Voice*, *Green Left*, and *Modern Diplomacy*. Spanning investigative reports, analytical essays, and reflective commentaries, these articles form a tapestry that illuminates the challenges facing Pakistan and its intersections with global realities.

As a journalist and commentator committed to uncovering truths often shrouded in silence, I have sought to amplify voices from the margins, challenge entrenched powers, and provoke thoughtful discourse on the moral and social responsibilities of our time.

At its core, this book is a chronicle of resilience amid adversity. Divided into five thematic parts, it navigates Pakistan's internal fractures while extending its gaze to broader geopolitical, economic, and digital frontiers.

Part I — "Pakistan's Struggles Within" examines the nation's systemic woes: from the government's reactive measures against alleged Umrah visa abuse by beggars, which mask deeper poverty and inequality, to rampant corruption and governance failures reflected in Transparency International's 2024 reports and the World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index, where Pakistan ranks 129th out of 142 nations. It dissects the ambitious promises of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) to bring inflation down to 4.9% by November 2024, juxtaposed against bureaucratic inertia and dynastic politics. Essays on labour laws highlight the neglect of institutions like EOBI and SESSI, where corruption deprives millions of workers of pensions and healthcare. "Pakistan's Blasphemous Politics" explores the rise of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and the weaponisation of faith, from the assassination of Salman Taseer in 2011 to TLP's 2.9 million votes in the 2024 elections.

Part II — "Shadows of Conflict and Human Suffering" exposes the raw agony of violence and neglect. In Parachinar, sectarian clashes claimed over eighty lives in 2024, rooted in land disputes and historical enmities, revealing governmental inaction despite Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's condemnations. The unfinished wars of Bajaur, from Operation Sherdil (2008–2009) to Operation Sarbakaf (2025), underscore

the persistence of militancy amid U.S. military aid controversies and civilian displacement.

Heart-wrenching stories from Sindh expose the disappearance of over 2,000 children since January 2023, with hundreds still unaccounted for, reflecting systemic failure despite the Zainab Alert Act. The extrajudicial killing of Dr Shahnawaz Kumbhar in September 2024, sparked by blasphemy allegations and mob violence, mirrors the dark interplay of ignorance and digital hate. Beyond Pakistan, "The Moral Betrayal of Gaza" critiques the complacency of Muslim-majority nations amid Israeli airstrikes, where rhetorical outrage often substitutes for moral action.

Part III — "Economic Crossroads" investigates global trade and the shifting alliances that define economic survival. From Donald Trump's 2025 tariffs of 29% on Pakistani exports like textiles, to the steady decline in U.S. aid (down to $21 million in FY25), these analyses chart the fragile balance of foreign dependence and domestic reform. The essays urge Pakistan to diversify its exports and strengthen regional partnerships through initiatives like China's Belt and Road.

Part IV — "The Digital and Economic Frontiers" bridges innovation and vulnerability. Comparing Pakistan's sugarcane yield (50–60 tonnes per hectare) with Brazil's 80–90 reveals untapped potential in

bioenergy and ethanol. “The Geopolitics of Solar Energy in China” dissects China’s 217 GW expansion in 2023 amid accusations of forced labour in Xinjiang and the global race to control clean energy supply chains. Taiwan’s AI hardware shift and multi-billion-dollar investments in North America symbolise the reordering of global production. Yet darker realities emerge — cryptocurrency crimes like the $1.5 billion Bybit hack in February 2025, and Pakistan’s eighteen internet shutdowns costing $1.62 billion, both representing the double edge of technology: progress and repression.

Finally, **Part V — “Towards a Just Tomorrow”** looks forward with both hope and caution. India’s WAQF Amendment Bill (2025), renamed *UMEED*, raises questions of transparency, inclusivity, and religious autonomy. “Stolen Democracy: Why Imran Khan Was Jailed” traces his 2024 imprisonment through cipher leaks, Toshakhana cases, and political manipulation, portraying it as a confrontation between a populist leader and Pakistan’s entrenched hybrid state.

To the Reader

Why should you read this book?
Because in an age of fleeting headlines and orchestrated noise, ***Echoes of Struggle*** offers clarity, context, and conscience. It is for those who seek understanding beyond trends — students, policymakers, activists, and ordinary readers who wish to grasp not only statistics but the *souls* behind them.

You will find in these pages both data and depth — from Pakistan's 2.4 million pending court cases to China's projected 1,000 GW solar capacity by 2025 — but more importantly, you will encounter the silent resilience of people living behind those numbers: the displaced families of Bajaur, the missing children of Sindh, the censored journalists of Balochistan, and the grieving parents of Gaza.

What will it give you? Perspective. Empathy. And perhaps, a renewed sense of responsibility to question, to care, and to act.

Ultimately, this book is not only a chronicle of struggles, but a mirror of our shared humanity — a call to confront uncomfortable truths and to imagine a world that values justice over power.

As we walk through these echoes together, may they resonate not merely as laments, but as catalysts for change.

— Syed Salman Mehdi
Rawalpindi, Pakistan
October 2025

Acknowledgements

I never thought I would write all this. I am an IT professional by trade, but my passion for reading and reflection brought me here — and one day, it simply began. It has taken me years of perseverance, study, and struggle to turn that small seed of curiosity into a fruitful tree of words and thought.

I am proud of my parents. The memory of my late father lives in my heart — a guiding light in moments of doubt. My mother, who raised me with tireless devotion, whose care and sacrifices made me capable, taught me to write, and still supports me even today. She forgives my mistakes and stubbornness like only a loving mother can, and her prayers are my constant strength.

I owe equal gratitude to my sisters, who are my arms and support, always walking beside me with love and encouragement. To my dear friends — few in number, but precious in loyalty — thank you for being part of my journey.

To my teachers, who not only educated me but gave me their valuable time and wisdom, I remain forever grateful.

I would also like to acknowledge all the editors and platforms who have supported my writing — from *Global Voices* (especially Rezwan), *Dissident Voice* (Kim P), *Paradigm Shift* (Editor and team), HumSub (Adnan Khan Kakar) and others who helped refine and share my work. If I were to name them all, it would take many more pages, but please know that each of you has my sincere appreciation.

And above all, I express my gratitude to the **Imam of the Age and Time**, whose unseen presence and guidance have always been a source of strength and purpose.

⚠ Disclaimer

This anthology is a self-published collection of writings by **Syed Salman Mehdi**, comprising articles written and published online between **December 2024 and September 2025**.
All pieces included herein are available publicly with their original **citations, source links, and accompanying images**. Readers wishing to explore references, verify facts, or engage with extended versions of these works are encouraged to visit the original online sources.

Every effort has been made to preserve the authenticity of each article as originally published. No major textual updates, alterations, or post-publication modifications have been made, in order to maintain the integrity and context of the time they were written.

This book is entirely a **self-produced work** — from writing and compilation to design, formatting, and layout — created independently by the author. Despite careful preparation, minor oversights or typographical errors may still occur. If any inaccuracies, omissions, or issues are found, readers are kindly requested to share their feedback via email at **salmanmehdi128@gmail.com**

Contents

Copyright Page II
Dedication III
Preface V
To the Reader IX
Acknowledgments XI
Disclaimer XIII
Table of Contents XV

Part I – Pakistan's Struggles Within

1 A Reactive Approach — Examining Pakistan Government's Measures in Response to Alleged Umrah Visa Abuse 2
2 Pakistan Struggles with Governance and Rampant Corruption 8
3 Fragile Foundations and Bold Promises of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) 16
4 Labour Laws & Social Security Systems — The Dilemma of Forgotten People 22
5 Pakistan's Blasphemous Politics 27

Part II – Shadows of Conflict and Human Suffering

6 Parachinar — A Forgotten Tragedy in the Shadow of Sectarian Violence 33
7 Bajaur's Unfinished War — From Operation Sherdil to Operation Sarbakaf 39
8 The Lost Children of Sindh — A Growing Horror 45
9 The Tragic Killing of Dr. Shahnawaz Kumbhar 49
10 The Moral Betrayal of Gaza 54
11 The Crisis in Sudan — Turmoil in the Muslim World ... 59

12 Switzerland's Burqa Ban — A Crossroads of Freedom, Identity, and Social Cohesion 68
13 The UK's Grooming Gang Narrative 74

Part III – The Chessboard of Nations

14 Bahri's Dark Geopolitical Ties 82
15 China and its Middle East Alliances 90
16 Geopolitical Chess — The Middle East Intrusion 98
17 The Middle East and the Future of the Kurds 107
18 Targeting Chinese Nationals — Unrest in Balochistan and the CPEC Challenge 113
19 Impact of BRICS on the US Dollar 119
20 Trump Tariffs on Pakistan — A Turning Point in Pak-US Relations 126

Part IV – The Digital and Economic Frontiers

21 Comparing the Sugarcane Production of Pakistan with the Global Leaders 135
22 Geopolitics of Solar Energy in China 143
23 Taiwan Powers AI — The Hardware Realignment 151
24 Crypto Exchanges — Fueling Crime and Wars 160
25 Digital Siege of Balochistan 168

Part V – Towards a Just Tomorrow

26 India's Parliament Passes Landmark Waqf Amendment Bill After Heated Debate 174
27 Stolen Democracy – Why Imran Khan Was Jailed 182

About the Author 189

“The oppressed are silent, the blood is speaking, the knot of martyrdom is being untied.

Part I

Pakistan's Struggles Within

A reactive approach? Examining Pakistan government's measures in response to alleged Umrah Visa abuse

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published December 22, 2024 – Global**Voices**)*

***Also translated in**: Español, عربي*

Pakistan's superficial policy responses overlook systemic poverty and inequality

In November 2024, Pakistan implemented stricter measures to prevent the misuse of visas for the Umrah pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Earlier in September, Saudi authorities alleged that Pakistani beggars were entering the country under the guise of religious pilgrimages and urged Islamabad to address the issue.

Under the new regulations, pilgrims must sign an affidavit pledging not to beg during their stay in Saudi Arabia. Those found violating this agreement will face legal consequences upon their return to Pakistan. Also, only group travel for Umrah is permitted, and a blacklist is being created to track violators. Tour operators are now responsible for collecting these affidavits from pilgrims.

Religious pilgrimages such as Hajj and Umrah hold immense significance in Islam, a faith practiced by over 97 percent of Pakistan's population. In 2024, over 179,000 Pakistanis were among the millions of Muslims worldwide who traveled to Saudi Arabia for these sacred journeys. Hajj, one of the five pillars of Islam, is obligatory for those who can afford it, while Umrah is a voluntary but highly revered act of worship.

Reputation at stake

Reports suggest that these measures aim to protect Pakistan’s reputation abroad. But they raise significant concerns about the underlying socio-economic challenges within the country, such as poverty, unemployment, high inflation, and rising energy costs. The issue is not solely the actions of a few individuals but the broader socio-economic conditions that compel people to take desperate measures. While steps like the Umrah visa affidavit target specific behaviors, they fail to address the root causes — poverty, unemployment, and inequality — that drive individuals to misuse pilgrimage visas in the first place.

One major concern with this punitive strategy is the inconsistency in accountability. While ordinary citizens face strict scrutiny and harsh penalties, Pakistan's political and economic elite often remain shielded from similar oversight. A report by the European Foundation

for South Asian Studies highlights the entrenched corruption in Pakistan's political sphere, where those in power frequently evade meaningful consequences despite serious allegations.

Desperation in Pakistan is largely driven by a growing wealth gap between the rich and the poor. This inequality is exacerbated by widespread corruption, poor governance, and exploitation by the nation's elite, including politicians, military leaders, and business tycoons. Reports by Transparency International reveal that corruption is endemic at all levels of government, with the elite leveraging their power to amass and protect wealth, while the majority of the population struggles to meet basic needs.

Crackdown on alleged beggars

In November 2024, Pakistan informed Saudi Arabia about its measures to crack down on beggars misusing Umrah visas. These steps included requiring affidavits and placing 4,300 beggars on the Exit Control List (ECL), barring them from traveling abroad.

Public opinion in Pakistan is divided on this issue. While some social media users praised the efforts, stating that they help deter pilgrimage visa abuse, others remain critical of the approach. As popular

platform X (formerly Twitter) remains banned in Pakistan, opinions can be seen on platforms such as YouTube and LinkedIn.

However, some argue that instead of blaming individuals, the focus should be on addressing the underlying socio-economic issues that drive people to beg.

On November 25, a ten-member group was arrested at Karachi Airport while attempting to travel to Saudi Arabia on Umrah visas. According to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), the group lacked hotel reservations and sufficient funds for their stay, raising suspicions of being trafficked for begging.

The Pakistan Interior Ministry stated that they have offloaded 44,000 passengers over various suspicions in the past few years.

Migration vs remittance

Many Pakistanis are compelled to seek better opportunities abroad due to the country's ongoing economic crisis since 2022. As of April 2024, migration data show that over 13.5 million Pakistanis are working in more than 50 countries, with significant numbers in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and the UK. In the past five years alone, over 3 million Pakistanis

have migrated abroad, half of them classified as low-skilled or semi-skilled.

> While millions leave in pursuit of improved living conditions, they are simultaneously expected to support Pakistan's economy through remittances. This creates a paradox: despite the country's heavy reliance on remittances, the underlying issues driving migration remain largely unaddressed.

The government's reliance on remittances — 24 percent of which come from Saudi Arabia — and international aid highlights a significant systemic challenge. The citizens who would benefit most from these funds are often excluded from accessing them. Political elites frequently exploit these foreign resources to maintain their own interests, further deepening the country's economic disparity.

The Pakistani government is also seeking investment from its diaspora through various initiatives, such as the Roshan Digital Account (RDA), which attracts overseas Pakistanis to invest in the country. This initiative has brought in around USD 9 billion in remittances over the past four years, up to October 2024. Despite these efforts, the reality on the ground remains challenging for the investors. Pakistan continues to struggle to attract foreign investment, and even domestic investors are looking to diversify their

assets abroad due to political and economic uncertainties.

According to a report by the Atlantic Council published in February 2024, Pakistan's economic revival requires comprehensive reforms, including strengthening property rights, increasing public investment in education and health, improving state capacity, implementing fair taxation, protecting minority rights, and creating conditions that support women's economic participation. Without these systemic changes, efforts to reduce begging overseas only scratch the surface and overlook the larger issues.

Pakistan struggles with governance and rampant corruption

By Syed Salman Mehdi
*(Originally Published March 5, 2025 – Global**Voices**)*

Also translated in:
***українська** [Ukrainian], **русский** [Russian], **Español** [Spanish]*

Recent changes in laws combined with judiciary protests have further destabilized Pakistan

Pakistan's legal system faces major challenges, including a lack of transparency, judicial interference, and widespread corruption. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2024 and the World Justice Project's (WJP) Rule of Law Index 2024 both indicate a worsening trend that threatens Pakistan's institutional stability. The reports show that judicial oversight remains weak, political forces are interfering with the judiciary, and freedom of the press is diminishing, all while corrupt practices continue to spread across public institutions.

> Recent changes in laws through constitutional amendments, along with new cyber regulations combined with judiciary protests, have escalated tensions throughout Pakistan's legal system and civil sectors. Digital speech restrictions grew stronger with changes made to Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act

(PECA) while the Supreme Court Practise and Procedure Act introduced reforms that reduced the power of the Chief Justice. Judges, together with lawyers, have protested against what they perceive as threats to judicial independence and the fair application of the law.

Rule of Law Index 2024

The WJP Rule of Law Index assesses 142 countries based on eight key aspects of institutional strength, legal integrity, and governance quality. Pakistan's latest ranking reflects a weak overall performance, placing 129 out of 142 nations. The country ranks among the worst in government accountability, judicial independence, and corruption control — issues that have deteriorated in recent years.

According to rights advocacy organizations, Pakistan urgently needs judicial reforms, as its court system faces a backlog of 2.4 million pending cases, including 57,000 at the Supreme Court level. Delayed court procedures become even more challenging because of a shortage of 15,000 and 20,000 judges, along with insufficient judicial facilities.

The Pakistani judiciary operates with limited strength because it lacks 1,005 judges from its 4,144 sanctioned positions, which brings its operational capacity to a

minimum of 75 percent. Of the 2,364 district judiciary positions in Punjab district courts, there are currently 822 vacancies. Likewise, the judicial sector in Sindh, KP, Balochistan, and Islamabad faces similar vacancies in their judicial roles. The judicial system operates under severe shortage because it has 4,000 judges for a population of 251 million people to manage 2.26 million pending cases. The country has one judge available for every 62,817 citizens.

A major concern is the government's weak oversight, with Pakistan ranking 103rd globally in the rule of law index's oversight category. The judicial system lost its strength when political entities started directly intervening because of the Supreme Court Practise and Procedure Act, which reduced the Chief Justice's powers, thus weakening the court's ability to limit executive power. Important democratic pillars continue to erode as the legislative system fails to hold the executive branch accountable while the media faces increasing restrictions.

Regarding corruption in the country, the WJP Index ranks Pakistan 120th out of 142 countries. According to the latest report from Transparency International, 35 percent of Pakistanis believe corruption has worsened over the past year, and one in four citizens pays bribes for essential services.

The most vulnerable institutions to corrupt practices are the enforcement agencies and judicial institutions, which deteriorates public trust in the justice system.

A lack of government transparency is worsening these issues, with Pakistan ranking 106th globally in this category of the rule of law index. The public has limited access to crucial information, as key decisions are often made behind closed doors. Meanwhile, news organizations face mounting restrictions on press freedom, with journalists encountering censorship, threats, and legal repercussions for reporting on government mismanagement and corruption.

Fundamental freedoms in Pakistan have deteriorated to the extent that the country now ranks 125th out of 142 nations in protecting basic rights. The government has intensified repressive measures to limit political criticism and has escalated the persecution of religious and ethnic groups. This repression is evident in the killing of journalist Arshad Sharif, the forced exile of YouTuber Imran Riaz Khan, and the misuse of blasphemy laws. Women's rights also remain a critical issue, as highlighted by the honor killing of Sobia Batool Shah for seeking a divorce and the murders of six women in northwestern Pakistan in November 2024.

Security remains a major concern, with Pakistan ranking 140th out of 142 countries in safety and order

on the WJP index. Terrorist activities continue to rise, particularly in border areas where militant groups operate unchecked. Political violence and street crime have further eroded public trust in law enforcement. Numerous financial resources allocated to military programmes have not resulted in the state being able to establish law and order in rural areas or tribal regions.

Legal enforcement also remains weak, with Pakistan ranking 127th globally in implementing business regulations, taxation laws, environmental protections, and safeguards for workers' rights. Many businesses operate illegally, and tax evasion is widespread. Due to high legal costs and a backlog of cases, the civil judicial system is now ranked 128th in the world, meaning justice is only accessible to Pakistan's wealthy elite.

Transparency International's Corruption Report: Pakistan's Declining Position

Data from the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index 2024 establishes Pakistan's declining governance standards, ranking the country 135th out of 180 nations. Public institutions have become increasingly vulnerable to corruption, reflected in a two-point drop in Pakistan's national ranking between 2023 and 2024.

In its 2024 Article IV Consultation, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reiterated concerns over Pakistan's economic governance, stressing the urgent need for structural reforms to improve accountability and transparency. According to the report, the judiciary and police are the most corrupt institutions, as officials often secure their positions through political favoritism and enforce selective justice in critical legal cases.

> The country's anti-corruption statutes often fail to be implemented because weak enforcement mechanisms allow high-profile corruption cases to evade proper punishment.

Recent legal controversies

Political pressure is destabilising Pakistan's judicial system. For example, the 26th Constitutional Amendment, passed in October 2024, has sparked significant debate and controversy. This amendment, which shifts the authority to appoint Supreme Court judges from the judiciary to the legislative body, has faced widespread criticism from expert legal analysts because it undermines judicial independence. By granting lawmakers control over judicial appointments, the amendment enables them to install judges aligned with their political views while simultaneously weakening the judiciary’s ability to check executive power.

Legal organizations, along with lawyers and members of the Supreme Court Bar Association, have publicly condemned the amendment, arguing that it is an attempt by the government to manipulate judicial rulings in favor of political interests. In January 2025, protests outside the Supreme Court in Islamabad escalated into violent clashes between lawyers and police, resulting in multiple arrests and injuries.

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act 2025 has introduced legal challenges that threaten internet freedoms and free expression in Pakistan, granting the state greater control over digital content under the vague pretext of combating “false information.” Under this amendment, citizens who spread online information deemed fake or false can face up to three years in prison. The anti-fake speech law fails to define which content qualifies as false information, creating a risk for journalists and dissidents.

Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and other international human rights organizations have voiced their concerns about the amendment, warning that it could be used to suppress digital discourse. The law also introduces penalties for political content and criticism of the government, reinforcing state control over social media platforms.

Urgent need for reform

Pakistan's judicial system, law enforcement, and governance structures urgently require reform due to deep-rooted corruption, security threats, and political interference that undermine stability. Decisive government action is required for the protection of civil liberties, upholding judicial independence, and enforcing effective anti-corruption measures. Without meaningful reforms, Pakistan risks further instability, deterring investors and eroding democratic values.

Fragile Foundations and Bold Promises of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC)

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published January 11, 2025 – **ParadigmShift**)*

The SIFC (Special Investment Facilitation Council) is a crucial element in Pakistan's economic revival, aimed at attracting foreign investment and reforming governance. It has achieved notable progress, such as reducing core inflation and initiating key construction projects. Effective public-private partnerships and learning from international models are essential for the SIFC to enhance transparency, accountability, and ultimately achieve its goals for sustainable economic growth.

> The three-tiered SIFC has turned out to be one of the most vital building blocks in Pakistan's economic revival strategy. As set up to attract foreign investment, reform bureaucratic structures, and foster critical strategic initiatives, the SIFC is a positive development. However, it is measured against political possibility, civil-military relations, and the systemic vices of governance, which can set in to frustrate its results.

Achievements of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC)

The SIFC has made significant, realistic improvements. Core inflation fell significantly and reached 4.9% in November 2024, the lowest index since 2018 (PBS). Fiscally transformative measures are focused on reducing inflation to 7% within the next five years, although the growth had been estimated from 3.6% to 5.5% in the next three years (MoF P, 2024 Economic Outlook). Then, the debt-to-GDP projection is to d 6ecline to 68.6% by 2025 and 66.6% by 2027. Such words from the IMF reflect financial stability.

> Firstly, the government's revived construction of the 1,100-TEU containership at the Karachi Shipyard clearly indicates the revival of maritime capabilities in the country. This $24.75 million plan is in line with the SIFC's general intention to industrialise, create jobs, and expand the blue economy.

> Continued attempts to muster Saudi investments through ten saleable projects prove the government's efforts in utilizing foreign relations for economic development.

Governance Challenges and Structural Criticism

Nevertheless, these accomplishments remain masked by systemic inefficiencies and governance issues threatening the SIFC's future solvency. The council criticises a centralised decision-making format due to adverse impacts that can limit provincial democracy and depower democratic policies.

> For instance, delays in implementing projects like the Siah Dik Copper Project in Baluchistan are evidence of unresolved bureaucratic issues, per information available in Balochistan Mining Updates, 2024. Moreover, a lack of disclosure and weak interaction with users and other stakeholders complicate the council's assessment of the stated goals and aspirations.

Lessons from Past Pakistani Dynastic Politics and Policy Inertia

Historically, political conditions in Pakistan have always been problem-ridden with dynastic politics and politically fragmented provinces, which have typically acted as barriers to any concrete reforms. Successive governments, both civilian and military, have struggled to implement policies that transcend short-term political gains. These structural problems remain; this, for example, can be seen in the failure to implement past economic programs consistently.

> Again, it should build bipartisan support and guarantee that its programs are beyond the influence of politics. As with promissory economic projects such as the Pakistan Steel Mills revival, political intervention has proven to be a hard-core break of political goals due to other political interferences, as evidenced by the Economic Research Institute of Pakistan.

The Role of ECC and Private Sector Engagement

In response to SIFC's demands, the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) has made many development projects, supplementary grants, and subsidies more readily available. These consist of creating the Siah Dik Copper Project and reorganising the Pakistan Revenue Automation Limited (PRAL) (Minister of Finance). These policies aim to revitalise mining, construction, and IT segments to have an efficient, diversified economy.

> Council partnership with the private sector thus supports its other facet. The existence of synergistic public-private partnerships is demonstrated by the work that the government can do with the help of organizations such as the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) in matters of infrastructure and taxes. Examples, including the Rawalpindi Ring Road and the government drive to advance the use of Real Estate Investment Trusts

(REITs), indicate the continuous emphasis on sustainable urban development and investment.

International Models and Future Prospects

The SIFC could learn from many developed countries how they got to where they are now, e.g., Malaysia's Economic Planning Unit and Singapore Economic Development Board, among others. These models consider openness, efficiency of the agencies' interaction, and effective cooperation with the private sector as key advantages (World Bank Development Reports).

For the SIFC to record similar achievements, it requires working for increased transparency and accountability. To ensure that the council's activities correspond to national and provincial intentions, independent audit structures must be developed, different stakeholders must be involved, and decision-making must be decentralised.

Moving Forward: A Balanced Approach

Complaints about dynastic politicians and military encroachment in politics should not blind society to the council's ability to foster economic growth. By adopting a balanced approach that combines strategic planning with

inclusive policymaking, the SIFC can catalyze transformative change.

> Between Pakistan's economic rebirth and operation and stagnation, only this council's heads-and-shoulders expertise exists in the soft art of managing high expectations and realizable goals. This includes redesigning the system to identify the appropriate lines of work, engaging all the stakeholders involved, and using international examples. Consequently, if these goals were realized, the SIFC could foster better economies and stability.

Conclusion

The Special Investment Facilitation Council is a good chance for the country to reboot its economy and move forward. So far, it has implemented some measures, providing hope for improvement. Addressing system issues and promoting a new governance model will continue to be critical for the long-term success of the NDIS. While Pakistan currently faces an uncertain future, the success of converting ambitious plans into realistic projects will define the success of the SIFC.

Labour Laws & Social Security Systems — The Dilemma of Forgotten People

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published December 1, 2024 –**HumSub**)*

Labour laws and social security systems in Pakistan, which are intended to safeguard workers, have succumbed to systemic neglect, corruption, and incompetence. Institutions such as EOBI and SESSI fail to keep their commitments, putting millions of workers in severe situations, according to a report by Iftikhar Ahmad in CLR.

> Labour laws and social security systems in Pakistan were enacted to provide a safety net for workers, notably private-sector employees and industrial labourers. These workers, who make considerable contributions to the economy, frequently face exploitative working conditions such as low pay, a lack of healthcare, and little legal protection. Social security organisations, such as the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI) and the Sindh Employees' Social Security Institution (SESSI), were established to address these challenges and offer workers financial and medical protection.
>
> However, during the previous two decades, these organisations have failed to carry out their mandates.

Instead of protecting workers' rights, EOBI and SESSI have become rife with corruption, incompetence, and systemic negligence. For example, billions of rupees earmarked for retirement and healthcare have been plundered, depriving many workers of their due entitlements. Employers, too, have used labour law loopholes to underpay employees and deny them access to life-saving protections. (The Express Tribune and Home-based Workers ILO)

Apart from the agricultural sector, private sector and factory employees in Pakistan regularly face legal discrimination, low wages that are low and inadequate healthcare. Pakistan's social security schemes, such as the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI) and the Sindh Employees' Social Security Institution (SESSI), are intended to provide a safety net for the country's workforce. However, during the previous 25 years, these organisations routinely fail to meet their mandates. The institutions have come to symbolise systematic negligence, ranging from inefficiency and corruption to insufficient coverage and disdain for employment regulations. The failure of these social security schemes underscores the critical need for change to combat corruption, increase enforcement, and ensure that every worker in Pakistan is treated with dignity and fairness. Until these challenges are

addressed, the nation's labour force will be subject to exploitation and systemic neglect (Sadia Zaheer).

In a similar vein, most registered workers are unable to use SESSI's healthcare facilities due to a lack of funds. These social security systems benefit only a small percentage of Pakistan's workforce, which totals more than 70 million people. Over 80% of workers labour in the enormous informal economy, which is excluded from SESSI's primary coverage of formal-sector workers.Due to the insufficiency of the EOBI database, millions of senior individuals do not receive pensions. Contrary to common opinion, these safety nets do not cover informal workers, who are often the most vulnerable. (Human Rights Watch).

Sindh's government raised the minimum salary rate for industry workers by 15.62%, according to a Tribune story on October 22, 2024. Semi-skilled workers earn Rs 38,280 per month, skilled workers earn Rs 45,910, and highly skilled workers earn Rs 47,868. In 2023, the salary will be reduced to PKR 32,000, although enforcement remains lax. Manufacturing and textile companies continue to underpay their employees by exploiting labour legislation loopholes. Both professional and unskilled workers endure hazardous working conditions and delayed pay. (Tribune)

SESSI and EOBI operate without worker participation, and regulatory barriers render their services mostly inaccessible. Many elderly people are compelled to live alone since pension claims might take years to process. Workers have a limited awareness of their rights under these regimes. Poverty and economic difficulties compel many elderly people to labour over the age of 75. It is frequently observed that the majority of females have lower-paying jobs. (Eaber)

Pakistan's social security coverage is significantly less extensive than that of its neighbours. India, for example, has implemented tiered systems that provide workers with higher healthcare and pension benefits based on their skill level. Even Afghanistan and Bangladesh have made progress in formalising labour regulations. (Human Rights Watch and The Express Tribune).

To address these issues, the following reforms are necessary.

- **Improving Transparency:** Conduct impartial SESSI and EOBI audits to detect and punish corruption.
- **Extending Coverage:** Ensure that workers in the informal sector are covered by the system, including pensions and healthcare.

- **Streamlining processes:** Introduce digital platforms for registration, claims, and fund disbursement to reduce delays.

- **Worker involvement:** To ensure that policies reflect their interests, include worker representatives on decision-making committees.

- Tough Enforcement of Labour Laws: Establish processes to enforce and punish noncompliance with the minimum wage.

Though they began with noble intentions, SESSI and EOBI have grown to reflect systemic dysfunction. If significant changes are not implemented, these institutions will continue to fail the very workers they are expected to safeguard. To ensure that all workers, regardless of industry or job rank, receive the respect and safety they deserve, the government must prioritise modernising these systems. Only then can Pakistan strive to build a decent and equitable economy that recognises its workers as an essential component of the country's development.

Pakistan's Blasphemous Politics

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published September 27th, 2025 – **DISSIDENTVOICE**)*

The assassination of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer by his own bodyguard, Mumtaz Qadri, in January 2011, marked a turning point in Pakistan's politics. This act of violence opened up a new chapter in Pakistan's politics, wherein blasphemy laws and religious emotions serve as the foundation of a fully organised political movement, which terrorises the state.

> Qadri, a supposed member of the elite police, shot Taseer for having publicly mocked Section 295-C of the Penal Code, a notorious provision that calls for the death penalty for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad P.B.U.H, and for going to the defence of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman charged under the same law. While the state executed Qadri in 2016, his funeral was attended by tens of thousands of people, turning him into a martyr in the eyes of religious hardliners. His tomb in Rawalpindi has since become a pilgrimage site for those who judge him to be justified for "defending the honour of the Prophet".

From this explosive background, Khadim Hussain Rizvi, a preacher in a wheelchair and known for his fiery sermons, went on to found Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) in 2015. He set his movement on the pedestal of the Qadri legacy, committing to resist any alteration to the law of blasphemy. Under Rizvi, TLP perfected mass street protests, paralyzing sit-ins, and ceaseless campaigns that branded any call for reform as betrayal of Islam.

The leadership moved onto his son Saad Hussain Rizvi after Rizvi passed away in 2020. Younger Rizvi was proclaimed unable by many to recreate his father's magic, but the TLP entered into unprecedented strength. In the 2024 general elections, TLP won nearly 2.9 million votes, rising to the fourth-largest party nationally and the third in Punjab.A remarkable leap for a party born no more than a decade earlier.

The blasphemy law as a political weapon

Section 295-C was included in the penal code of Pakistan during the Islamisation drive imposed by General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s. Advocates of this blasphemy law consider it a need for the protection of the religious sentiments of a deeply religious society. This, however, has been the theory. The law is vague, easily manipulated, brutally effective in its enforcement, and catastrophic in its consequences.

Many have been attacked or lynched by mobs even before their case reached the courts. Human rights activists long had been demanding reform, noting that the law places entire communities of Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, and even moderate Muslims under constant threat. But the political cost of reforming it has always been too intolerable for any government.

TLP's politics of coercion

This has created a fierce atmosphere which TLP organised into a political movement. Thousands of its party members have shut down streets whenever the government hinted at reforms or an incident arose that was perceived as offensive. Their sit-ins brought cities to a standstill, economies to their knees, and turned the government into a beggar in negotiations.

> The dynamics created by such events have formed a really dangerous precedent. Rather than strengthening institutions, governments have given credence to street power in their dealings with the TLP. The TLP has thus benefited twofold from each of its street movements: it gets its demands addressed and has ever-increasing strength underwritten. The message is loud and clear: in Pakistan, blasphemy politics can kneel down the state.

As an answer this is very little.

- **The political normalisation of extremism:** The rise of TLP has mainstreamed religious populism from a fringe to the major political space.
- **Rule of Law Erosion:** Blasphemy allegations have an otherwise potent capability in politics as instruments passing over judicial tribunals.
- **Stifling of Dissent:** Reformers and critics from the political parties like Taseer to lawyers and journalists are bombarded with threats, exile or worse.
- **Growing Intolerance:** Minorities and vulnerable groups live under constant threat, while Pakistan's international reputation suffers.

This is a reality that was made stark in December 2021 when a mob in Sialkot lynched the Sri Lankan factory manager Priyantha Kumara over blasphemy allegations. His body was set ablaze in broad daylight, while hundreds filmed the brutality on their phones. The lynching sparked global outrage, including in Sri Lanka, one of Pakistan's allies. It exposed the lethal mix of religious zeal, mob vigilantism, and state weakness. Arrests ran into the dozens, but the event portrayed the ease with which accusation replaces evidence, making visible how mob violence looms over the justice system.

A shadow over Pakistan's future

The legacies of Salman Taseer's murder, glorifying Mumtaz Qadri, the rise of TLP with Khadim and Saad Rizvi, and the horrors of incidents like that of the Sialkot lynching tell a hard truth: blasphemy laws have ceased to be just provisions in the law. They have morphed into political instruments, mobilisation tools, and symbols of power.

> Ending this cycle will not be easy. Reform of 295-C is politically dangerous, but without reform, Pakistan risks deeper polarisation and approaches closer toward mob justice and increasingly fragile democracy.
>
> Pakistan faces a stark choice: continue down a path where outrage and coercion dictate policy, or reclaim the republic by restoring the courts and parliament as the only arbiters of law. The shadow of Taseer's murder and tragedies like Sialkot linger on, and whether the country will face or yield to them in the end will define the future of its democracy.

Part II

Shadows of Conflict and Human Suffering

Parachinar: A Forgotten Tragedy in the Shadow of Sectarian Violence

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published February 6, 2025 – **DISSIDENTVOICE**)*

Amid its beautiful and quite vales of Parachinar lying between the two neighbouring countries, Pakistan, the echoing of muffled screams can be heard far too often as families lose their dear ones to sectarian terrorism. Once surrounded by the natural beauty and orderly with friendly neighbours and kin folk, this town can now boast about appearing to be hell on earth—the manifestation of an entrenched conflict that has taken so many lives. It is not a story of just a small town named Parachinar but also a testimony of hatred between two sects of a religion that has not come to its lowest even today in Pakistan and so in the world.

> Hence, Parachinar is perhaps the habitual site of this systematic genocide of the Shia community, which is not just shocking but has become normal in the region. The last act of violence happened on November 21, 2024, when armed men targeted and attacked two convoys of Shia pilgrims in Kurram district; at least 42 people were killed, including women and children. Such attacks, which occurred while under police escort, are proof that insecurity remains a major problem in the

region. The violence is however new in the region since July this year, and most recurrent conflicts are due to land issues between the Shia and Sunni militias. The retaliatory violence that followed led to over 80 fatalities within days. That is Shane's argument, and he blamed most of the carnage on the Sunni insurgents: all but 28 of the dead were Shia. This cycle of violence, fanned by ethnic and tribal animosities as well as historical enmities, highlights longstanding social tension in Kurram that makes the region rather sensitive because of the mixed population.

This incidence of violence is not an isolated event but is part and parcel of a sectarian problem in Pakistan. That such violence cannot be controlled by the Pakistani government shows that the problem is a failure of governance. Conflict and fighting between different Shia and Sunni groups in Kurram has become almost an annual event over the years; in the period between 2007 and 2011, more than 2,000 people died in Kurram. At a governmental and societal level, the recent increase in deaths and tears of families is a clear indication that intervention is required.

The tragedy in Parachinar occurred in November 2024, in particular on November 21, a brutal attack on Shia pilgrims. Gunmen pumped bullets on two convoys accompanied by the police, in which 42 persons lost

their lives, including women and children. What happened is not unique, but it fits into a dark trend—a growing cycle of violence that has only amplified since the summer. This conflict arose basically from land disagreement between the Shia and Sunni; this led to acts of revenge killing over eighty persons, of which sixty-six were from Shia. These occurrences cannot be just viewed as skirmishes but point to the incessant bitter ethnic enmity and past resentments that still exist in Kurram.

The government response has been quite poor. Although Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also expressed his anger against the violence in the country, this was done very late and with insufficient actions and words of the victims' families mourning in Pakistan. Demonstrations across Pakistan have protested about inaction against what is regarded as the genocide of Shia Muslims. However, unsurprisingly, the government is yet to suggest clear courses of action. This passivity is symptomatic of a larger social and governmental negligence in shielding its people from sectarian militant aggression.

This violence in Kurram has deeper seeds, compounded by regional and political factors and perhaps bad governance. More than 2,000 people have died due to sectarian clashes in this region between the periods of

2007 and 2011. The recent steps were provoked by local concerns and the Shia-Sunni strife that emerged during the Syrian civil war, which was used by radicals. This unfortunate phenomenon of sectarian violence in Pakistan, especially against Shai Muslims, has led to several critical questions concerning security and relationships within and between groups in a country that has well-rooted sectarian tension.

Inability to address these problems continues to perpetrate violence in Pakistan and brings discredit to the government at the international level. It is symptomatic of a broader problem of governance in which policing or security does not suffice. There is another important factor of the situation: violence against women, which during the conflict intensified due to the constant impunity of the actions of those who use violence and general disregard for the rights of minorities.

Opposition parties in Pakistan have joined people in the streets to make their condemnation of the attack in Parachinar very loud and clear. The protesters have demanded that the government provide security for its people against cultists' aggression. Such attacks need to be condemned by the government, and such condemnation, as laudable as it is, falls short of what is required. Increased security measures, identification,

arrest, and prosecution of those persons responsible for such attacks, and sustainable solutions to looking into the grievances of these sects are called for.

While the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has rightly condemned the violence, it is extremely necessary to move towards practical politics and take strong actions against the culprits. The establishment should define the type of security it has in store for everyone, including non-Muslims. Thus, international pressure is important in compelling the government to implement mechanisms that would ensure such incidences are not repeated. It is high time global society stood up and demanded that Pakistan should do something to address the unenviable situation of vulnerable groups in the country.

For this reason, it is now the responsibility of the international community to bring the plight of Parachinar to the limelight so as to apply pressure to Pakistan to perform its primary function of protecting its citizens. Various stakeholders should continue putting pressure on governments to enhance law enforcement, implement security measures, and promote entities that vigorously respect religious and ethnic diversity. Fatima and other victims' voices must be escalated to create empathy towards the terrible acts witnessed happening in Parachinar and areas like this.

It is important to support organisations that are actively combating extremism and building healing and unity as a result. These organisations are at the centre of the problem, helping the victims, fighting for their rights, and seeking reconciliation. In this respect, NGOs are of immense help to women because, through providing assistance of various kinds, increasing the public's visibility towards such issues, as well as initiating and supporting changes in the law, they help to halt the violence. It is not only for the reason to save lives of Shia Muslims under attack in Parachinar but to enhance the status of any minority across Pakistan and other countries as well.

This pain of Parachinar needs to go to remind the world how much it requires the values of empathy and togetherness. This is evidenced by the constant fear experienced or persecution, suffering that pervades the lives of its people, therefore the need to pay attention and act. Let us not forget the lives lost, and let us try to make the valleys of Parachinar do not ring with pains instead with the animation of tomorrow's smile. Parachinar catastrophe is a test for humanity; it is the struggle between right and wrong, good and evil—violation of human rights. It becomes possible only when we recognise these conflicts and work to eradicate them in order to have a society where sectarian violence has no room.

Bajaur's Unfinished War: From Operation Sherdil to Operation Sarbakaf

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published September 15th, 2025 – **DISSIDENTVOICE**)*

Bajaur is among Pakistan's tribal districts that witnessed the greatest battle in the war on terror. In the days of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Al-Qaeda strongholds, it has seen military operations time and again over almost two decades. The campaigns like Operation Sherdil during 2008–2009 showed some fierce counterinsurgency fighting; Operation Sarbakaf in 2025 highlighted how militancy stayed but in a different form ever since it was nearly defeated. The occurrence of various successful and funded coercive instruments, however, did not automatically dissolve the insurgency in Pajaur, reflecting the difficult situation for the extremist institutions. The unfinished war develops the argument that counterterrorism in the region is not only a military challenge but also a struggle counted in politics and society.

Operation Sherdil: Breaking the TTP Stronghold

Operation Sherdil was launched in August 2008, illustrating one of Pakistan's largest counterinsurgencies in FATA. About 8,000 plus troops of the Pakistan Army and Frontier Corps, supported by air power, marched into Bajaur Agency

as an anticipating preemptive force to dislodge the established TTP. They had fortified the district as a headquarters from which to influence northeastern Afghanistan. By February 2009, the operation was declared a success, with approximately 1,800 estimated militants killed and some hundreds captured. Yet the cost was high in terms of lives of coalition forces, the lacerated civilian displacement, and infrastructure of the military bases. Still, the TTP retaliated with strikes, indicating the limitations of Sherdil to provide Bajaur long-term peace.

The TTP's Enduring Threat

The TTP group was founded in 2007 under Baitullah Mehsud, quickly becoming among the most deadly militant groups in Pakistan. Unlike the Afghan Taliban, whose interest is in national control, the TTP is more inclined towards sectarian violence and used to stage regular bombings with frequent suicide bombings, particularly carried out against Shia Muslims and state institutions. For them, Al-Qaeda was a source of financial, logistical, and ideological sustenance. Over time, the group found its links to various cross-border sanctuaries between Afghanistan and Pakistan, being based in an underground shelter and sheltered in caves. In 2025, TTP had lost quite a bit but retained fighters, mostly resorting to having bases inside of Afghanistan. Pakistan formally blamed some Afghan intelligence elements and forces shaped by Afghanism

[Urdu term افغانیت (Afghanīyat), which reflects the ideological mindset among certain Pashtun groups that only their interpretation of Islam and law should prevail — an outlook carried by both the Afghan Taliban and later the TTP] for the incursion and for not providing real assistance against TTP militancy. All the foregoing compels us to see why militant violence in Bajaur has resisted almost everything.

U.S. Military Assistance and Its Controversies

Fighting against terrorism in Bajaur has been broadened to get financial support for Throne of Dollars from the USA. The American government started granting millions of dollars for Pak Army equipment endowing the F-16, MI-17, night vision devices, and secure communication infrastructures. All of these things were like shooting adrenaline to Pak war machinery and let campaigns like Sherdil dominate the battlefield. This aid was highly controversial in its own way as critics raised questions on the effective use of this assistance and warned of weapons leakage to militant groups. After a consequence of the Taliban from Afghanistan in 2021, a public shift is seen from NATO-grade arms to TTP arsenals; this incident added fuel to suspicions concerning diversion and battlefield capture. This $7-billion figure, almost as commonplace in the media debates as is the perception that a good chunk of the money spent continued to indirectly aid insurgents, goes a long

way to underline that support can equip the state but also foster political mistrust.

Civilian Toll of Bajaur

The tribal communities of Bajaur are among those that have suffered unimaginably over the years due to repeated military operations. Operation Sherdil left thousands of families homeless and destroyed the infrastructure: schools, bazaars, and clinics were destroyed. Operation Sarbakaf was supposed to somewhat rectify this situation by evacuating people into relief camps and providing medical services, but civilian casualties were still left to bear the brunt of displacement and trauma. The unending cycle of violence has eroded the trust of the masses in the state, which militants capitalise on. Local elders lament that development and governance promises are often abandoned once operations are declared over. This social aspect shows that military success alone cannot bring peace to Bajaur. Without education, jobs, and credible governance, the space for militant groups to recruit and regroup will remain. Thus, the war in Bajaur is as much about rebuilding lives as it is about annihilating the insurgents.

Evolution of Militancy 2009–2025

Militancy in Bajaur has changed so much with the passing of years. In 2009 TTP, foreign Uzbeks and Arab jihadists were controlling areas like Damdola and Khazai Ghar under commanders like Maulvi Faqir Mohammad), sitting pretty and openly boasting of their power. The victories of the Pakistani Army pulled them out of territories, but the fighters withdrew into the mountains where they regrouped under new banners. TTP, while internally fighting, allied with other factions like Jamaat-ul-Ahrar and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi; some factions tilted toward ISIS-K. By 2025, the insurgency had become less about holding territories and more about sporadic ambushes, assassinations, and recruitment drives. This evolution is a clear demonstration of the flexibility and adaptability of the militants, as they changed their mode of action from open warfare to clandestine insurgency. This explains why even after so many "victories", Bajaur remains an unresolved security concern two decades onwards.

Conclusions

The trajectory of Bajaur has transformed from Operation Sherdil to Operation Sarbakaf, revealing transformations of Pakistan's counterinsurgency strategies and an evolving resilience of militant networks. Sherdil's heavy fighting in 2008-2009 reclaimed territory at a terrible cost to civilians, while Sarbakaf in 2025 sought to combine targeted strikes with humanitarian safeguards. Sustained by regional safe

havens, ideological networks, and alleged external sponsorship, however, TTP's persistence shows that this war is far from over. While U.S. massive military aid has given Pakistan leverage, it has opened the Pandora's box of fears of leakage to insurgents and another complication to counterterrorism discourse. The Bajaur conflict ultimately points out that victory over militancy requires more than force; it requires prolonged governance, social rehab, and regional cooperation. Until these dimensions are aligned, Bajaur's war remains unfinished, a reminder of how insurgencies live where politics and development cease.

The Lost Children of Sindh — A Growing Horror

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published December 11, 2024 –**HumSub**)*

Since January 2023, over 230 children have gone missing in Karachi and Sindh province, leaving families distressed and sad. Sindh has reported 2,066 cases of missing or kidnapped children in the last 21 months, with 1,828 found and returned to their families. Karachi, the country's commercial centre, has documented 623 incidents of missing children in 2024 alone, including 491 boys and 132 girls who have vanished from their homes, schools, or localities.

> Sindh police have stepped up their efforts to identify missing children, reuniting 1,304 with their families in 2023 and 524 in 2024. However, for the 238 children who remain missing, the trail is frequently cold. Despite technological advancements and regulation frameworks such as the Zainab Alert Act, the task of locating missing

"A haunting crisis of missing children, untold stories, and shattered families in Karachi and beyond."

An intolerable tragedy engulfs hundreds of families across Sindh, particularly in its largest city, Karachi. More than 230 children have gone missing since January 2023. Their whereabouts are unknown, their tales are unheard, and their families are overcome with confusion and sorrow. This devastating discovery was made at the Central Police Office during a meeting presided over by Sindh Inspector General of Police Ghulam Nabi Memon.

> The numbers are heartbreaking. In Sindh, 2,066 cases of missing or abducted children have been reported in the last 21 months. Of these, 238 children's fates are still a mystery, while 1,828 children were located and reunited with their families. In 2024 alone, Karachi — Sindh's largest metropolis and the nation's economic hub — documented 623 cases of missing children. Of them, 132 girls and 491 boys disappeared from their neighbourhoods, schools, or homes, leaving behind unresolved questions and distraught families.
>
> The absence of a kid is a never-ending nightmare for parents. "Every time I close my eyes, I see his face," says Zahida, a Karachi mother whose 12-year-old son has been missing for months, describing her distress. I discover he's not there each time I open them. The solitude is intolerable, the nights never end, and the days are heavy. Every missing child represents a universe of potential and love that has abruptly

vanished. Unused toys and empty rooms serve as mute reminders of lives cut short. Siblings, friends, and extended relatives share the grief, but it never gets any easier.

With increased efforts, the Sindh police were able to reunite 1,304 missing children with their families in 2023 and 524 in 2024. However, the case frequently goes unanswered for the 238 youngsters who are still unaccounted for. Finding missing children is still a laborious process, even with the help of legal frameworks like the Zainab Alert Act and technological developments. In Karachi's chaotic metropolitan environment, police face numerous obstacles, including a lack of monitoring, scarce resources, and the overwhelming complexity of investigations. Recovery attempts are further complicated by the threat of human trafficking and organised crime, as finding the children becomes more challenging every day.

Communities in Sindh have been permanently scarred by the disappearances. Families live under constant anxiety, schools are dominated by caution, and playgrounds are quieter. Parents give their kids harsh cautions to be attentive and watchful, but the anxiety still persists—what if it happens to us next?

Speaking on condition of anonymity, a school principal from Karachi stated: "We have witnessed children

disappear during the day. It's terrifying as well as heartbreaking. These days, every parent is concerned about whether their child will return home." Many of the missing children might have been drawn into nefarious networks of exploitation, such as forced labour, human trafficking, or worse, experts caution. These anxieties highlight the harsh fact that many may never return home, while also emphasising how urgent recovery efforts must be. Everywhere in the neighbourhoods where the missing children live, their absence is felt. The silent tale of lives stopped, hopes postponed, and futures taken is told by empty classroom chairs, unread books on desks, and toys left undisturbed.

This is more than a numerical disaster; it is a human tragedy. Every number represents a child with a name, family, narrative, and future. For their parents, the pain of their absence gets worse with each passing day. Sindh's missing children are more than just a local issue; they represent a greater crisis of safety, security, and justice. It requires immediate attention and collaboration from law enforcement, communities, and legislators. Until these children are recovered or their stories are revealed, their families' agony serves as a cruel reminder of society's failure to safeguard its most vulnerable.

The Tragic Killing of Dr. Shahnawaz Kumbhar

Blasphemy Allegations, Police Brutality, and the Fight for Justice

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published February 18, 2025 – **DISSIDENTVOICE**)*

The September 2024 extra-legal murder of Dr. Shahnawaz Kumbhar exposed the lethal combination of blasphemy charges with improper policing practises in Pakistan. The incident reveals both human rights challenges that blasphemy accusation victims face and questions the proper role of law enforcement agencies regarding justice and human rights protection.

Background of Dr. Shahnawaz Kumbhar

The district of Umerkot in Sindh now associates its entire symbol with Dr. Shahnawaz Kambhar who suffered brutal murder despite being a resident. Religious fanatics murdered a doctor who remained innocent to his killers. Dr. Shahnawaz Kambhar distinguished himself as a community healthcare worker who received credit for his social activities and charitable activities in the field. His mission included organising free medical programs throughout

Umerkot alongside neighbouring rural communities that offered free medical care to all patients. Through his lifetime he devoted himself to enhancing his impoverished residential belt despite the fact that he could have amassed considerable wealth in Karachi like numerous medical professionals do. Through his ongoing healthcare mission he placed greater emphasis on achieving better public health results in his local area.

The Blasphemy Allegation and Subsequent Dismissal

Dr. Kumbhar encountered the ordeal after a local mosque cleric claimed to discover blasphemous content on his social media account. His swift removal from medical service at the civil hospital in Umerkot happened after the accusation was made. When a person in Pakistan faces blasphemy accusations their situation turns into a dangerous sequence that causes harsh legal consequences while society reacts with violent crowds and possible unlawful acts against the accused. The announcement of such allegations against someone becomes an immediate vehicle for both reputation destruction and personal security risks.

Extrajudicial Killing and Fabricated Encounter

Dr. Kumbhar received arrest after the complaint against him. Officials showed him a fair trial but ultimately

murdered him during a fake police confrontation. The first police statements stated Dr. Kumbhar died during a gunbattle but investigations showed he stayed under police detention throughout and officials deliberately created the encounter to legitimise his killing. The discovery shows an alarming trend where security forces perform unauthorised killings in highly sensitive cases regarding blasphemy incidents.

Investigations and Legal Proceedings

A complete investigation by the Sindh Human Rights Commission (SHRC) exposed both legal violations and administrative failures following the incident. An extensive investigation started by the Chief Minister of Sindh caused him to suspend multiple high-ranked police officers involved in the case. The legal authorities filed 45 individuals to court with murder and terrorism charges and violations of the Torture and Custodial Death Prevention Act 2022 against Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Javed Jiskani and Superintendent of Police (SSP) Asad Chaudhry. The non-bailable arrest warrants did not prevent multiple accused officers from evading arrest which demonstrated existing legal system failures to enforce responsibility upon influential officials.

Exhumation and Forensic Findings

The authorities obtained Dr. Kumbhar's body for thorough autopsy procedures after exhuming him to find out what had happened. The forensic examination proved beyond doubt that Dr. Kumbhar had suffered from torture which the first autopsy report had completely failed to detect. The contradictory findings of the autopsy led authorities to arrest Dr. Muntazar Leghari who conducted the first autopsy thus leading to his charges for doctoring medical evidence to hide misconduct. This case element shows how medical and legal systems allow collusive actions between professionals that cause justice to be delayed while maintaining conditions of absolute freedom from prosecution.

Role of Social Media and Mob Violence

Per the SHRC report social media played an important part in worsening the situation. Social media users spread inflammatory content along with false information which triggered widespread public anger leading to violent mob activities. The death of Dr. Kumbhar triggered an enraged mob to seize his body afterwards leading them to use fire to defile it and they tried to bury it without proper funeral rituals as police made insufficient attempts at intervention. The instant consequences of improper social media usage emerged in public perception while demonstrating how dangerous such behaviour can be in delicate situations.

Wider Implications and Call for Reform

The medical professional's case corresponds to a fundamental issue in the way Pakistan manages blasphemy charges. Multiple incidents registered by the Centre for Justice indicate how accusations of blasphemy have resulted in mistrials of justice that often end with extralegal killings. The established patterns demonstrate that it is essential to create thorough legal reforms that defend the basic rights of citizens and stop blasphemy law misuse.

Conclusion

The unlawful death of Dr. Shahnawaz Kumbhar provides evidence about the dangers facing people accused of blasphemy in Pakistan. Both current legal codes and law enforcement practices need to be evaluated immediately in order to make significant adjustments that will protect individual rights and uphold the rule of law.The absence of reform measures will allow violent and unjust practises to continue which will simultaneously endanger the rule of law and damage state institution credibility.

The moral betrayal of Gaza

By Syed Salman Mehdi

(Originally Published December 6, 2024 – Green Left, Issue 1420)

As airstrikes ravage Gaza, destroying homes and killing civilians, the Muslim world's silence is distressing. While politicians voice rhetorical anger, actual action is lacking, leaving Palestinians to face a relentless military onslaught alone. This disparity between words and behaviour contradicts the ideas that are supposed to unify us.

> The cognitive dissonance that has come to characterise Muslim-majority countries' reactions to Israel's prolonged assault on Gaza is startling. On the one hand, nations throughout the Muslim world have publicly condemned Israel's conduct, offering professions of support for the Palestinian cause. On the other hand, these states continue to conduct diplomatic and commercial relations with Israel. This inconsistency reveals a deeper disease at the heart of our political institutions — one in which self-interest trumps humanity.

Double standards

How can nations claiming to support Islam and justice criticise Israeli brutality while normalising relations with

the same state? This discrepancy is morally wrong and politically irresponsible. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, among others, have grown closer to Israel in recent years, despite Israel's continuous occupation of Palestinian areas. For these regimes, practical politics has surpassed meaningful action to challenge Israel's military might or assist Gazans.

> This leadership failure is not only a betrayal of the Palestinian struggle; it is also a rejection of Islam's core ideals of justice and human dignity. Governments that claim to promote these ideals must be consistent in their foreign policy, not just when it benefits their geopolitical interests.
>
> Western powers frequently identify groups like Hamas and Hezbollah as "terrorists" in global narratives, and many Muslim-majority countries accept this name without question. Rather than confronting such depictions, these leaders prioritise political expediency and distance themselves from organisations that oppose Israeli occupation.
>
> While contentious, Hamas is a prominent actor in the resistance against Israeli occupation, yet its methods and role remain highly disputed. Rather than confronting these realities, Muslim leaders have mostly chosen denunciation, agreeing with labels that free Israel of responsibility.

Geopolitical interests over morality

The relationship between Muslim-majority countries and Israel is frequently motivated by self-interest and the desire of economic or strategic ties. For example, the UAE's decision to normalise relations with Israel in 2020 was driven mostly by shared concerns over Iran's regional influence. Saudi Arabia, too, is rumoured to be moving towards similar normalisation. However, while these partnerships may benefit short-term political and economic interests, they have a heavy moral cost.

> Muslim governments must question themselves: at what cost are these relationships made? Is it worth risking Palestinian lives for economic deals, defence accords or regional power plays? The lack of genuine pressure on Israel, or even the refusal to cut connections with the state, demonstrates a troubling prioritisation of political expediency over the lives of those living under occupation.

> Former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and former Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto exemplified pan-Islamic sympathy with Palestine some decades ago. These leaders took strong positions against Israel, often at significant political cost. Today, such leadership has evaporated, replaced by governments more concerned with appeasing Western

powers and protecting the status quo than with taking significant steps to alleviate Palestinian suffering.

The absence of leadership in the Muslim world is more than a political failure; it is also a moral failure. When Muslim leaders act in self-interest, disregarding the millions of suffering Palestinians, they violate the very ideals that should define their leadership. Declaring denunciation is insufficient; real action is required.

A call for grassroots mobilisation

In the absence of strong government leadership, ordinary Muslims must stand up. People who stand in solidarity with Palestine must put their words into action. This necessitates campaigning within families and communities, as well as sustained pressure on governments to implement policies that are consistent with the ideals of justice, dignity and humanity. It entails persuading governments to halt their role in Israeli apartheid and to provide meaningful support to the Palestinian people, rather than merely hollow promises.

Beyond political activism, there are several avenues to provide actual aid to the Palestinian people, including humanitarian organisations and grassroots groups. The global Muslim community must mobilise, not simply in solidarity, but also in action. We must hold our leaders

accountable for their inaction while simultaneously acknowledging that we have the ability to make a change.

Palestinians face not only Israeli aggression but also the indifference of Muslim-majority countries. The hush must stop. Leaders and grassroots activists must work together to pressure governments to end their complicity and stand firm for justice. Gaza's survival, as well as the moral integrity of our global community, is at stake. Cognitive dissonance must be resolved.

The Muslim world must make a choice: will it continue to sell its soul for political gain, or will it stand firm in defence of justice, humanity and the ideals that Islam so dearly cherishes?

Now is the time to speak up and act. Gaza's survival is dependent on the courage of Muslims worldwide to stand up and demand a better, more just world.

The Crisis in Sudan — Turmoil in the Muslim World

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published February 7, 2025 – **ParadigmShift**)*

The Sudan crisis is a devastating humanitarian disaster fueled by ethnic strife and a brutal power struggle between the SAF and the RSF since April 2023. Widespread killings, displacement, gender-based violence, and economic collapse have deepened the turmoil, echoing crises in other Muslim-majority regions like Palestine, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Urgent ceasefire agreements, aid, and accountability mechanisms are essential to prevent Sudan from becoming another forgotten tragedy.

> A decades-long political crisis and ethnic divide in Sudan has led to the nation's most devastating humanitarian disaster, where large-scale killings supply a backdrop to widespread starvation. Since April 2023, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) have joined forces with the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) for bitter combat, which resulted in massive fatalities and grievous injuries totaling in the millions.

> This power confrontation between opposing forces has created national disorder, which involves ethnic breakups, fighting offences, and economic degradation. Because of civilian suffering, the continuous warfare pushed Sudan onto a growing list of majority-Muslim regions that includes Palestine, along with Iraq and Syria, Yemen, Burma, and Lebanon. The prolonged conflict has far-reaching consequences for security and stability in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere.

Ethnic Killings Amid Power Struggles

AWAP news sources indicate that the strategic city's recapture by SAF forces is now facing accusations of ethnic cleansing. Human Rights Watch (HRW) observers have documented streets full of dead bodies during this chaotic process since minority populations faced specific targeting. Multiple studies show that the ethnic cleansing that took place in Darfur matches the forms of violence occurring now in Sudan's history, according to reports from Human Rights Watch in December 2024.

> Interracial fighting has worsened since conflict recommenced, which has created a lethal pattern of assaults and population relocation for residents. UNHCR (December 2024) reports that the Sudanese refugee count in this region exceeds 1.4 million while

continuous population movement continues to lift total displacement numbers.

Find more statistics at Statista

Rooking settlements have scraped multiple villages to bare earth as commercial facilities vanish and citizens confront destitution via joblessness and starvation. The ethnic-based targeting of groups during the ongoing conflict establishes multiple infringements of human rights that qualify as a grievance against humanity while exposing fundamental cultural rifts across the battle zone. This crisis in Sudan continues to deepen as the situation unfolds.

Gender-Based Violence and War Crimes Against Women and Girls

These vile human rights violations extend past mere acts of murder combined with property destruction. The weaponization of sexual assaults against women and girls destroys any ethical framework families and countries ought to host.

> Muslim believers have abandoned every rule of their religion, and our duty remains to resist oppression, yet the oppressor's life shows no interest in protecting innocent people from harm. Through detailed investigations, Human Rights Watch has showcased

how fighting groups seize women to rape them before turning them into sexual prisoners someday after conflicting artists endure insufferable conditions beyond description. Conflict survivors encounter extended emotional wounds in settings that discourage victims from sharing abuse experiences or expressing their victimization despite cultural shaming.

US intelligence officials attributed two chemical weapon incidents to Sudanese forces, which reportedly represent the most abhorrent threat to human security. These crimes against humanity that break international law continue to harm innocent civilians they target while revealing the complete absence of human kindness among fighting forces. The continued fighting exacerbates the humanitarian catastrophe, while UNICEF reports on the devastating impact on children caught up in the conflict. This issue is worsening, resulting in extensive damage. The incident is an extreme example of how global wars are getting out of hand in places like Sudan.

Strategic Infrastructure and Economic Fallout

The South's attack on northern infrastructure reflects the financial costs of the protracted conflict as they try to seize crucial facilities around Khartoum. The economic backbone of Sudan, which depended on oil profits, now

fuels the ongoing war and enables rulers to use such revenue to maintain oppressive control. The economy faces collapse after needed facilities are destroyed. At the same time, price inflation becomes extreme due to the seizure of basic goods whose delivery has become restricted to millions of citizens, forcing vulnerable populations to starvation as reported by Arab News in January 2025.

> This developing conflict has a significant influence on Sudan's economic stability, with UNHCR reporting extensive displacement. The humanitarian crisis worsens as the conflict progresses, with serious ramifications for the region's long-term stability. UNICEF emphasizes the severe impact on children, while the global conflict tracker places Sudan on the rising list of conflicts threatening world security.

Regional Implications of the Sudanese Humanitarian Crisis

The ongoing struggle in Sudan continues to pour across its international borders. South Sudan suspended social media operations for a limited period to suppress misinformation while stopping potential border conflicts. The Horn of Africa faces escalating instability because of the ongoing civil war in Ethiopia and Somali insurgencies. However, its

turmoil will likely intensify if Sudan fails to control its domestic conflict.

A Pattern in the Muslim World

The crisis in Sudan demonstrates how national issues echo broader problems that Muslim nations currently face. Muslim-majority nations face ongoing political turmoil along with global indifference after suffering through the Palestinian occupation and Iraq sectarian conflict, as well as the Syrian War and Yemen famine, plus Afghanistan destruction.

> The ethnic and tribal divisions driving Sudanese violence show parallels with Syria's sectarian battles and Iraq's ethnic disputes. During the Syrian War in Aleppo, doctors faced extreme medical circumstances similar to those currently being encountered at Al-Fisher. According to projections, Sudan should suffer a split similar to the expected Syria partition while the current territorial manipulation continues to create a bloodbath whose horrors remain unknown.

Global Inaction to the Sudan Crisis

The enormous multidimensional disaster has received ineffective responses from the international community alongside the Muslim community. The humanitarian appeal

from the United Nations for $2.6 billion to support Sudan received only half of this amount, according to UN OCHA (December 2024). The SAF and RSF forces restrict aid due to the limited access to affected zones. Israel uses identical methods to block aid reaching Palestine while simultaneously suffocating the Palestinian population.

> The International Criminal Court (ICC) launched an investigation into war crimes in Sudan, yet enforcement difficulties linked to increased conflict blocked productive outcomes. World powers remain disinterested in pushing Sudan's warring factions to establish peace terms, which shows a hidden purpose while deepening the human crisis (ICC, December 2024).

The Path Forward

Addressing Sudan's dilemma demands immediate and concerted action.

Ceasefire Agreements: Arranged through the African Union, or IGAD, the SAF and RSF should establish a ceasefire to restore peace.

Humanitarian Access: International aid organizations should receive complete access to region checkpoints to provide essential emergency relief to vulnerable

communities while preventing human casualties in areas facing starvation.

Accountability Mechanisms: War crime investigators should prioritize identifying true offenders punishable by justice. A plethora of international support exists for the ICC to prosecute wrongdoers. The historical records lack any demonstrable case of complete justice for those who have suffered oppression. I wish to let the reading audience draw their conclusion.

Addressing the Root Causes: A sustainable solution requires addressing ethnic diversity, ensuring resource equality and right distribution, and restoring trust via inclusive governmental systems.

Conclusion

The war in Sudan is not an isolated tragedy but part of a larger pattern affecting the Muslim world. The international community and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) must take decisive action to prevent further bloodshed and address the structural problems driving these conflicts, lest their indifference to this atrocity, as it has done in Yemen, Gaza, and Syria in the past and present, make them even more suspicious. Without intervention, Sudan risks becoming another forgotten chapter in the long history of suffering in Muslim-majority countries. The

world cannot afford to ignore this unfolding catastrophe as another nation collapses under the weight of violence and neglect.

Switzerland's Burqa Ban — A Crossroads of Freedom, Identity, and Social Cohesion

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published January 3, 2025 – **COUNTERPUNCH**)*

At the call of midnight on December 31 of the year 2024, Switzerland has put in the practice of a new burqa ban, and in this way the question of freedom and culture freedom along with the authority of the state comes again in the front line. It bans full-face veils, like the niqab, in organisations, with penalties of up to CHF 1'000 (approx. 307,700 PKR). This movement coming in a country that once upheld the principle of neutrality and democracy showcases society's constant fight to uphold individual freedom against the process of assimilation.

> The cognitive dissonance that has come to characterise Muslim-majority countries' reactions to Israel's prolonged assault on Gaza is startling. On the one hand, nations throughout the Muslim world have publicly condemned Israel's conduct, offering professions of support for the Palestinian cause. On the other hand, these states continue to conduct diplomatic and commercial relations with Israel. This inconsistency reveals a deeper disease at the heart of our political institutions — one in which self-interest trumps humanity.

The Referendum Debate

The basis for the burqa ban can be traced back to a 2021 referendum in which 51.2 percent of Swiss citizens voted in favour of the ban to explore the extent of diversity in Swiss society. The right-wing supporters of the ban include the Swiss People's Party (SVP), who stated that such a ban is important for security and integration as well as conserving Swiss culture. Critics, on the other hand, have condemned it as an infringement of the right to religious freedom, particularly for Muslim women who prefer to wear the burqa as an item of faith.

> Such characteristics of direct democracy made the law legitimate in Switzerland since people voted on the national level. However, the decisive margin on the right side should not mask the fact that the fighting to balance personal freedom and more and more emerging cultural concerns remains a tallying on for the nation.

The Law's Provisions

The new law is to prohibit the wearing of the burqa and the niqab in any public place or in a private domain opened for the public. Some times can be excused by medical conditions, religious purposes, climatic circumstances, or some events that are not a threat to the social order. It has been criticised as mimicking legislation existing in France,

Belgium, and other European countries, which has led to protests and court cases. Such measures have led to various questions with regard to the governments of Europe on the issue of the freedom of religious practice in society and with regards to the integration of multiculturalism.

Who Is Affected?

Currently, Muslims are few in number in Switzerland but are scattered in all the regions of the country. The cantons with the highest proportion of Muslims living in them in 2019 were Basel-Stadt, where 8.17% of the population were Muslims, followed by Glarus with 7.72%, Solothurn coming third at 7.63%, while Zurich and Geneva had 6.49 & 6.24% of Muslims, respectively. However, what also emerges is that only Geneva from the cantons detailed here has a Muslim population greater than the Swiss average of 5.40%. Immigrants account for 88.3% of the Muslim population, primarily from the former Yugoslavia (56.4%), Turkey (20.2%), and Africa (6%). There are barely 7 to 10 thousand native Muslims in the country, out of a total of 400 thousand people.

> Nevertheless, not all Muslim women living in Switzerland wear the burqa. This is a practice carried out by a minority of Muslim conservatives comprising the Salafists among the Sunni as well as certain Shia Muslims of Iranian decent. This raises important

questions: do you think that burqa could turn into the weapon of Muslim feminists to defy such legislation for women? If such a movement takes hold, it will not only destabilise Switzerland but also cause severe consequences across Europe, the United States, and other countries with increased tensions.

Tensions and Consequences

Muslim communities are already more managing wider socio-political concerns such as the Palestine crises and Arab Spring. Measures like the burqa ban, to which Muslims can hardly fail reacting as discriminated, excluded, marginalised, lumpen people, are experienced as backlash laws. Sceptics have a lot of criticism on this, saying that such measures only worsen the situation in the country and do not solve anything.

A Global Discussion: Swiss Identity vs. Multiculturalism

Supporters of the ban on burqa argue that this measure was introduced to advance the process of socialisation and increase the level of safety, while estimating that face coverings are obstacles to integration and potential threats to security, particularly in situations where identification is necessary. They stated that such measures are necessary for

the protection of the national cultural integrity and security of spaces.

> On the other hand, the opponents view the ban as an attack on the rights of religiously practicing people and as the destruction of Swiss values. This law only makes it even more possible for us to be isolated." This is not an issue of safety; it is an issue of power, opined a Swiss Muslim woman along with other human rights organisations. It will be recalled that these critics argue that such laws risk sharpening divisions in societies rather than bringing them together.

A European Trend?

It is a part of European trends—Switzerland has banned burqa; the same law regulates attire in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Some of these strategies that the advocates of secularism and national identity argue for have been accused of discriminating specifically against Muslim women.

> Finally, the most important question in this contest is how the identity and unity of modern society with the multicultural difference can be reconciled. While Europe struggles with this question, Switzerland has made things even more complicated. The implications of this work will probably not only stay for Switzerland

but also can contribute to multiethnic nations' debates in other states.

Looking Ahead

While Switzerland continues with the process of enactment of ban-regulation regarding burqa, it is still hazy regarding its repercussions. Thus, the question out of interest will be whether the law will help to increase social solidarity or, on the contrary, strengthen the existing social divide. Are tolerance, and especially any kind of religious tolerance, and assimilation harmony or opposition in their eternal struggle?

> Still now, Switzerland stays at the crossroad in question that serves as a prototype of many states in the modern world being in search of the optimal solution to the conflict of identity between an individual and society. The consequences of this experiment will be most dramatic, both for Switzerland, which has already seen the result of the plan in action, and for broad international debates over multiculturalism and other questions of living together.

The UK's Grooming Gang Narrative

Facts, Myths, and the Impact on Pakistani Communities

By Syed Salman Mehdi
*(Originally Published March 10, 2025 – **DISSIDENTVOICE**)*

The Media's Role in Fueling Misinformation

British society has been dealing with organised child exploitation through grooming gangs for an extended period. Official data contradicts media perceptions about who engages in these criminal activities by showing Pakistani men are not the main offenders. Official Home Office data indicates that defendants facing child sexual abuse prosecution in England and Wales are predominantly white since their number reaches 88 percent. News reports on offences by South Asian individuals receive unusually high attention from media outlets thus perpetuating racial misconceptions that deepen societal rifts.

The Origins of a Racialized Narrative

Forces of public discussion concerning grooming gangs grew stronger as three important cases occurred in Rotherham, Rochdale, and Telford during the early 2010s. Policing and child protection institutions revealed organisational breakdowns in their investigations while

media discussion primarily focused on the racial backgrounds of the offenders. The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) produces reports showing child exploitation happens throughout all racial and social backgrounds but Pakistani and South Asian men still face political accusations as chief perpetrators.

> The selective nature of this presentation has occurred previously. A series of investigative reports from The Times during 2011 identified Pakistani men as responsible for most grooming incidents. The overall issue of child sexual abuse transcends specific ethnic groups even though select cases linked South Asian offenders to the crime. Statistics from the National Crime Agency (NCA) confirm that white men carry out most cases of organised child exploitation but these crimes remain substantially underreported in the media.

How the Stereotype Affects Pakistani Families

The institutionalised stereotyping of Pakistani families in the United Kingdom has produced severe negative results. The students of Pakistani descent experience school discrimination through stereotype abuse which links them to sex exploitation gangs. A 2020 Runnymede Trust report documented Pakistani students who described teacher and peer bullying together with being labelled as “rapists” and

experiencing suspicion. Community members and employers also share the same prejudice toward Pakistani families that starts in educational institutions.

> Research shows doses of bigotry against Muslim communities have grown because of recent media accounts. Statistics gathered by Tell MAMA demonstrate that reports about South Asian male grooming incidents led to an increase in Islamophobic incidents. Social isolation and vandalism attacks against Pakistani businesses and their families can be found in certain areas.

Systemic Failures in Addressing Child Exploitation

The genuine matter at hand concerns institutional missteps rather than the ongoing focus on ethnicity in political discussions. Vulnerable children received failed protection from both the police force and social services departments and government agencies because these institutions did not respond to abuse reports because of limited resources and poor management. The Jay Report (2014) uncovered that agency authorities neglected multiple reports of child exploitation in the Rotherham child abuse scandal for more than a decade.

> The collective resources should move away from ethnic considerations so they focus on enhancing child protection legislation while training police forces and improving victim assistance services. The Children's Commissioner has reported significant issues in both the reporting and handling of child sexual abuse incidents regardless of the racial background of abusers.

Why Pakistanis Are Targeted in This Narrative

The way grooming gang discussion has turned racial shows how British society generally views Asians and Muslims. Right-wing media together with politicians exploit this topic to advance immigration control measures and strengthen Muslim community monitoring. The English Defence League (EDL) uses Pakistani and Muslim communities as a focal point to rally their members while they organise protests that lead to violent incidents.

> Throughout history the United Kingdom tends to blame minority communities for addressing broader social issues. The criminal investigation of Pakistani men for grooming gangs matches historical patterns of moral panics that previously targeted black muggers during the 1970s and Irish immigrants throughout the 20th century. Extending responsibility to an individual ethnicity creates diversion from institutional

breakdowns that exist in police organisations and welfare agencies.

A Call for Evidence-Based Solutions

To combat child exploitation effectively, the UK must adopt a zero-tolerance policy that is not influenced by racial biases. Recommendations include:

- Improved police training to handle child exploitation cases effectively.
- Better data collection on grooming gangs that avoids racial profiling.
- Stronger victim support services to ensure survivors receive adequate care.
- Accountability for institutional failures, including oversight of law enforcement agencies.

The UK is implementing key recommendations to combat child exploitation effectively. These include improved police training, better data collection, stronger victim support services, and accountability for institutional failures. Police training should focus on recognising signs of exploitation and understanding grooming complexities. Data collection methods should focus on behaviours and patterns, avoiding racial profiling. Stronger victim support services should ensure survivors receive adequate care and support.

Independent oversight bodies should monitor law enforcement and other institutions. Additional strategies include community engagement and awareness campaigns, partnership and collaboration between law enforcement, social services, schools, and community organisations, and the development and enforcement of robust legal frameworks. These strategies aim to move towards a more equitable approach to combating child exploitation. For more insights, refer to the UK Anti-Slavery Commissioner's report.

National authorities in the UK execute essential recommendations to overcome child exploitation better. The UK is adopting four primary measures to enhance child exploitation combat through upgraded police teaching combined with better statistical data acquisition and enhanced victim care programs and institutional oversight systems. The training curriculum for police officers must teach them to detect exploitation indicators as well as complex grooming procedures. Data collection systems should analyse behavioural activities and detect patterns instead of adapting racially biased approaches. The delivery of victim support should achieve complete care and support for survivors through improved service approaches.

External supervision institutions need to monitor both law enforcement departments along with other institutions. Effective child exploitation prevention strategies necessitate active collaboration between law enforcement, social services, schools, and community organisations, as well as community outreach and public education programs. Strict legal systems are also necessary. Such measures work toward building a more fair method of fighting child exploitation. The complete UK Anti-Slavery Commissioner's report contains additional detailed information about this subject.

Conclusion: Separating Fact from Fiction

The obsessive focus on Pakistani males in grooming gang stories produces misleading information which proves detrimental to both social harmony and genuine investigation. Racial stereotyping exacerbates social tensions, obscures institutional shortcomings, and places an undue burden on communities that bear no responsibility. The UK needs to stop blaming racial groups for its child protection problems while establishing complete child safety measures that approach the fundamental causes of child exploitation. Society guarantees child protection for children of every background through such measures alone.

Part III

The Chessboard of Nations

Bahri's Dark Geopolitical Ties

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published August 30th, 2025 – **DISSIDENTVOICE**)*

Bahri or National Shipping Company of Saudi Arabia is a giant maritime company in the Middle East. But, behind this commercial image, there is a provocative and worrying history of its geopolitical process, especially the means of transporting weapons and the manner in which Saudi Arabia participates in the geo conflict such as in Yemen and Gaza.. Since 2015, Saudi Arabia has been a major component of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen, which also comprises the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Morocco and Kuwait. This military effort by this coalition has caused high civilian fatality, dislocation of millions of people and in humanitarian terms is one of the worst disasters in the world, as reported by the United Nations. This article will attempt to create an enlightened balanced discussion of these controversies as it gives some background and insight to a novice reader yet with the professional and analytical style.

Bahri Saudi Shipping Company

Bahri, which is a national shipping company of the Saudi Arabia, engages mostly in international marine logistics as well as the transport of crude oil, chemicals and bulk

products and general merchandise. It also has big ships in oil products, dry bulk and specialised transportation. In an area of the world where maritime trade is one of the most essential veins, strategically based in the Red Sea and other trade gateways, the location of Bahri activities puts it in the realm of intersections between regional and international political dynamics, and as such, extends its operational being beyond commerce.

Weapons Transport to Israel Amid Gaza Genocide

In August 2025, the Saudi-owned Bahri Yanbu was at the centre of an international outcry after dockworkers in the port of Genoa, Italy, intercepted the ship after suspicions rose that it was carrying a heavy load of weapons bound to Israel. Independent observers and humanitarian organisations reported that among the cargo were Italian produced armed materials like Oto Melara naval guns, armoured vehicles, tanks, ammunition and explosives. The interception came at a time when Israel was actually undertaking heavy handed military actions in Gaza which are generally regarded as genocidal in character. A moral stance on becoming participants in the further crime in Gaza was one of the factors that drove the dockworkers into a blockade.

The consequences of this happening are huge. It brought into the spotlight the secret dealings-or at least acquiescence by Saudi Arabia to supply Israeli war machine despite the fact that Saudi Arabia holds official stands in favour of the Palestinian cause. According to critics, these moves are not only defied to the international humanitarian law, but go further to normalise and entrench the military and economic relations between both nations (Saudi Arabia and Israel). This change belongs to the larger scheme of things in Middle East where traditional enmity towards Iran and strategic interests have muted the old Saudi public opinion on the Palestine case in a silent bid of geopolitical balance.

> However, Bahri made a formal refusal to have any relations with supply of arms to Israel. The company made outright claims that it has never ever travelled to Israel in any form and fully complies with the formal policies of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in supporting Palestine and the entire international maritime laws. Bahri highlighted that it has strict monitoring and auditing practices that are aimed at striving to comply. Nonetheless, despite the rebuttals, the incident in Genoa has initiated combined efforts to conduct independent operations and exert more investigation to the maritime affairs of Saudi Arabia, which exemplified a cloudy backdrop of the policy regarding Saudi Arabia compared to its ethical statements.

Yemen's Conflict and Arms Supply

Probably the most sinister one in the recent history of Saudi Arabia foreign policy is the invasion of Yemen that the Saudi Arabia government has been carrying out since 2015. Saudi Arabia is at the forefront of a coalition that has been involved in large volume airstrike campaigns, naval blockade and ground offensives against the Houthi rebels, who have forced the internationally recognised Yemeni government out of big sections of their country. The ongoing conflict in Yemen is viewed by many observes, including the analysts in Al Jazeera and other local media stations as a kind of proxy warring between the majority-Sunni Saudi Arabia and the majority Shia Iran with the two nations, most times, supporting conflicting sides on the ground. Saudi Arabia also supports the Yemeni government of President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi that had been recognised by the UN Security Council resolutions in Resolution 2216 (2015).

> The maritime activities of Bahri are once more in the limelight as it transports weapons and military equipment to Saudi forces that partake in Yemen. Research carried out by anti-war movements and human rights groups in Europe found out that the Bahri ships are regularly transporting arms to Saudi Arabia including ammunition, explosives and heavy arms through European ports like Antwerp. The CSO

estimates by Amnesty international reveal that since the commencement of the war, Bahri has delivered hundreds of millions of euros of American and European, military equipment.

This weapon provision has been closely associated with a high number of the war crime charges charged against Saudi-led coalition such as civilian target attack and starvation weapons used in blocking of the sea by the coalition. The condition in Yemen is termed the worst humanitarian crisis in the world since more than 24 million people approximately 80 percent of the total population are in need of aid and millions have been starved, stricken by diseases, displaced, and basic services are becoming non-functional due to continuous conflict as stated by the United Nations and various humanitarian agencies. The importance of Bahri in this war as a logistic lifeline highlights the corporate aspects of this Saudi war machine and the intense intertwining of the business interests with devastating geopolitics.

Geopolitical Agenda

To appreciate the role of Bahri Saudi Shipping Company in such conflicts, it is important to understand Saudi geopolitical agenda in general. Saudi Arabia is a traditional foe of the occupation policies of Israel but over the past ten

years is slowly moving towards an avoidance of confrontation with Israel over mutual fears of allowing Iran to consolidate its influence in the region. In the past, Saudi Arabia has opposed the occupation policies of Israel, but over the last ten years there has been growing signs of it engaging in limited relations with Israel due to a shared worry of Iran and its growing role in the region, especially in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen (Israel-Saudi Arabia relations).

> According to the reports this rapprochement has involved activities such as secret intelligence-sharing at least on the issue of Iranian missile programs, discreet delegations meeting each other in the third nations and initial discussions of prospective technology and trade association. In the example, Wall Street Journal (2025) and Congress.Gov (2025) cover the cases when Israeli and Saudi officials met to align security policies against Iran.

> At the same time, Saudi Arabia still tends to regard Yemen as the essential buffer area that must be maintained to ensure access to the important strategic waterways, such as the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, which is essential to overall oil traffic and vital to the regional security. The kingdom views the Houthi movement as a proxy of Iranian policy and a serious direct threat to its southern borders, which influenced the long and

violent military operation that is criticised by the international community and labeled as war crimes.

The fact that Saudi Arabia publicly defends Palestinian rights and at the same simultaneously advances its strategic relations with the state of Israel and intensifies its military operations in Yemen presents a complex, at times self-contradictory policy based on the logic of realpolitik, the calculations of regional power interests, and the unification of the domestic and foreign policy of the Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Conclusion

The controversies surrounding Bahri Saudi Shipping Company reveal much more than a logistics enterprise; they expose a nexus of geopolitical interests, ethical dilemmas, and the harsh realities of Middle Eastern conflicts. The ship interception in Genoa spotlighted Bahri's alleged role in facilitating arms shipments during an ongoing genocide in Gaza, while its broader operations underpin Saudi Arabia's war efforts in Yemen, exacerbating one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters.

While the company officially denies transporting weapons to Israel and asserts full compliance with policies and international law, evidence from protests,

investigations, and independent reports portrays a different picture—one of a state and its corporate instruments engaged in complex and controversial power plays with severe human costs.

For novice readers, it is essential to recognise that Bahri operates at the intersection of commerce and conflict, reflecting Saudi Arabia's evolving and contentious role on the world stage. The ongoing scrutiny of these activities underscores the urgent need for transparency, accountability, and adherence to international humanitarian norms in international shipping—and for the global community to hold such actors to those standards.

China and its Middle East Alliances

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published April 22, 2025 – **ParadigmShift**)*

China's growing influence in the Middle East stems from strong economic partnerships and a non-interventionist diplomatic approach. As the top trade partner for GCC countries and the leading global oil consumer, China's strategic investments through the Belt and Road Initiative enhance regional infrastructure while securing its energy needs. By mediating tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran, China positions itself as a key player in reshaping power dynamics, challenging traditional Western dominance in the region.

Over the years, China has reinvented itself as a significant force in the Middle East via economic dominance, pragmatic diplomatic endeavours, and technical advancements that challenge old regional power relations. China continues its strategic expansion in foreign affairs through a strategic approach that emphasises commercial relations, infrastructure development, and diplomatic activity. This geopolitical shift produces substantial developments that transform Middle Eastern politics and speed up the global shift toward multiple global power centres.

Economic Engagement: The Bedrock of Influence

China strengthens its Middle East influence through economic power. The GCC states have established China as their leading trade partner, while China consumes the most oil globally. The economic partnership between China and GCC countries recorded explosive growth between 2000 and 2025, with trade volumes expected to exceed $300 billion due to China's rapid economic growth.

> China's Belt and Road Initiative serves as an additional instrument to solidify its strategic power. Through its initiative, the country has built massive infrastructure by providing $10.5 billion for Iraq's infrastructure in 2021 and a $400 billion long-term contract to modernise Iranian ports' energy systems. The strategic investments result in dual benefits: they ensure China's energy security while accelerating the growth of regional economies, thus making Beijing an essential partner in the region.
>
> China uses regional technological integration to support its economic objectives in the area. Huawei, Alibaba, and Tencent are partnering to enhance 5G networks, artificial intelligence (AI), and cloud computing for the Digital Silk Road (DSR) initiative. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and

the China Development Bank offer financial opportunities to support Middle Eastern economies, thus intensifying China's economic relations throughout the region.

Diplomatic Strategy: The Non-Interventionist Alternative

China follows different diplomatic practices compared to Western nations' interventionist actions. Beijing strengthens ties with rival factions by practising non-interventionism and maintaining close relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran. China's nondiscriminatory foreign policy serves well because it lets the country mediate between major military conflicts while keeping past war involvement out of the way.

Beijing employed diplomatic expertise to mediate a deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2023, an excellent demonstration of its political skills. The diplomatic arrangement in Beijing showed China's growing position as a peace broker and opposed Washington's traditional leadership role in such processes. China adopts a policy of "creative involvement," which enables regional nations who desire independence from Western conditions to choose dialogue as a strategy over enforcement. Through the China-Arab States Summit, Beijing offers

diplomatic interaction that avoids ideological limitations for all participants.

Security and Strategic Partnerships: A Shifting Balance

The Chinese diplomatic approach in the Middle East goes beyond economic and official relationships to establish security agreements and military partnerships. China implements security changes in Asia using weapons deals while conducting joint military drills. Middle Eastern states are becoming more integrated into alternative power blocs through China's Global Security Initiative and its growing role within the BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). These developments resulted in a decrease in American security dominance in the region.

The strategy brings significant hazards during its implementation. Platform sales of Chinese military equipment to countries under sanctions alongside secretive military partnerships give rise to regionwide arms competition and unclear security conditions. China profits from the weakening American security system, yet its avoidance of direct regional military engagements restrains its ability to fulfil the role of a genuine security guarantee force.

Technological Collaboration: The Digital Silk Road and Its Implications

China's Digital Silk Road (DSR) is a cornerstone of its Middle East engagement, deepening its technological and economic ties to the region. Partnerships with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt have positioned China as the dominant 5G provider, while research collaborations in AI, cybersecurity, and smart city technology reinforce its foothold. The mBridge digital yuan initiative, which enables cross-border transactions between China and Gulf states, threatens to erode US financial influence over the region.

> Middle Eastern countries have achieved technological developments and economic diversification, but China's growing digital infrastructure has caused Washington to raise security concerns. The US government has repeatedly cautioned its allies about potential harmful cyber operations stemming from Chinese telecommunications systems, while the competition between these world powers intensifies technologically.

Regional Stability: A Double-Edged Sword

The economically centred Chinese strategy has reduced brief Middle Eastern conflict tensions. As China focuses on building economic connections above political interference,

the nation acts as a stability-building actor. However, China's conflict mediation work involves only superficial techniques that concentrate on controlling issues without implementing effective solutions.

> Critics suspect China makes economic priorities its main focus during conflict resolution, which produces temporary stops in disputes but fails to solve the core causes of dissatisfaction. However, China's arms sales to sanctioned Western actors and other parties increase regional instability while failing to create sustainable peace.
>
> China's economic support does not come with political strings attached, which is in opposition to the United States' policies that mix economic aid with demands for human rights and democratic advancement. China's practical political approach attracts states, yet creates stronger economic dependence on its financial support and technological systems.

Challenges to US Influence: The Diminishing Role of Washington

The increasing power of Beijing actively threatens American control over Middle Eastern territories. China demonstrated its foreign policy capabilities by stepping into vacant diplomatic positions previously held by America, as Saudi

Arabia and Iran restored their relations. China also organised stronger economic and security alliances with its usual US allies, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt, which reflects a strategic adjustment.

> China's economic alliances perfectly support regional development strategies, including Saudi Vision 2030, by establishing relationships without Western banking institutions. Through unrestricted military hardware exports, China enables local powers to enhance their independence in security matters. By establishing itself as an honest economic and security provider, Beijing has become essential in managing regional power shifts.

Conclusion: Toward a Multipolar Middle East

China's active shift of focus in Middle Eastern matters leads to new regional partnership arrangements while speeding up the emergence of multiple global power centres. China reached this position through its economic integration, neutrality in diplomatic matters, and technological market leadership, which allowed it to move beyond traditional Western powers.

> China conducts business deals but fails to create lasting transformations. China has accomplished temporary conflict resolution with economic advantages, but its

refusal to reform political procedures raises concerns about durability.

Geopolitical Chess — The Middle East Intrusion

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published December 15, 2024 – **ParadigmShift**)*

Syed Salman Mehdi writes on the complex geopolitical dynamics in the Middle East, focusing on the collaboration between Zionists and Turkey to undermine Palestine, alongside the US-Israeli alliance. He discusses geopolitical theories that illustrate the strategic importance of Israel, American interests in the region, and the ongoing violence and instability that affect countless lives. His op-ed concludes by emphasizing the importance of intelligence in military operations and hints at a potential strategy behind perceived failures in detection and response.

> Zionists and Turkey are apparently collaborating to undermine Palestine. The US-Israeli alliance's nationalist fanatics have clearly invested much in this "Great Game," even as Turkey grapples with the legacy of the Lausanne Treaty. If a few hundred thousand are slain, what difference does it make?
>
> Throughout history, ever-changing maps and geopolitical theories have sought to explain the acquisition of power by force and dominance, shedding light on the Middle East's continuous dynamics,

particularly Israel's strategic relevance and American engagement. Friedrich Ratzel's Organic Theory described states as living entities that require territorial expansion to survive (Politische Geographie, 1897, Oldenbourg Verlag), a concept that the US has continued to support to maintain influence in the resource-rich Middle East.

Alfred Mahan's sea power theory emphasized trade route control and maritime dominance as the most important components of world power (The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1890, Little, Brown & Company), reflecting American interest in protection and military projection in the Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf.

Halford Mackinder's heartland thesis identified Eurasia as the center of world governance (The Geographical Journal, 1904, Royal Geographical Society), with Israel and the Middle East functioning as critical gates to this vital area. Karl Haushofer's pan-region theory envisioned self-sufficient blocs, with American attempts to keep Israel stable in the face of an alliance of opposing nations such as Russia and China (Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean, 1924, Kurt Von Wunkel Verlag).

Nicholas Spykman's Rimland thesis advocates for control of the coastal territories encircling the heartland, with the US collaborating with Israel and Turkey to rule these strategic areas. Saul Cohen's Shatterbelt theory saw fragmented regions like the Middle East as arenas of great power competition (Geography and Politics in a World Divided, 1963, Random House), as evidenced by recent power shifts, such as Turkish-backed forces seizing control of Damascus following the fall of Hafez Bashar al-Assad's regime. Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory defined the US-Israeli relationship as a global hierarchy in which core states such as the US extract economic and strategic value from periphery regions.

Zbigniew Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard Theory emphasized the importance of Eurasia in American strategy (The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives, 1997, Basic Books), with Israel functioning as a critical partner in countering opponents such as Iran and protecting American interests. Henry Kissinger's Realpolitik emphasized practical relationships and balance of power (Diplomacy, 1994, Simon & Schuster), explaining American backing for Israel in the face of larger regional instability. Modern technology-driven theories stress cyberspace and innovation as new theatres of power (Cyberwar: The Next Threat to National Security

and What to Do About It, HarperCollins, 2010), with Israel's superior technical skills making it an American ally. Palestine is an open-air jail laboratory with lethal weapons labs, destroyed cities, and sophisticated weaponry tested on humanity.

Together, these ideas show how the occupation of Israel and American assistance solidified American geopolitical hegemony while also securing substantial influence in an unstable area, assuring supremacy in global trade, energy markets, and strategic military positions. The demise of the Assad government and Turkey's expanding role in Syria highlights the dynamic fight for influence in this critical area. But how many people have been and will continue to be victims of this bloodshed? There are no Shiites or Sunnis, Arabs, Turks, Persians, or Palestinians, only people who are unable to live peacefully in their neighborhoods because foreign powers seek to govern the world.

The aforementioned beliefs highlight that events like the migration of Jews to Palestine during World War II, the rise of the Ba'ath Party, and the abrupt fall of Hafez Bashar al-Assad's regime were not entirely unexpected. Unfortunately, sitting in Pakistan, I can only attempt to grasp the situation and observe that no one is in charge of it. This series does not appear to be coming to a close. Military operations require extensive and

meticulous planning, including surveillance, intelligence gathering, logistics, and troop mobilization. They involve more than just transferring troops from one location to another; they also require detailed planning and continual execution.

In principle, the United States and Israel should be able to identify such actions due to their superior intelligence capabilities, which include satellite monitoring, signal interception, and human intelligence. However, there is a failure to act on accessible intelligence. The inability to detect may be evidence of a planned strategy rather than a failure to detect. This strategic monitoring is often portrayed as part of a larger geopolitical strategy serving long-term national objectives. One possible explanation for Israel's military preparedness and intelligence limitations could be their alignment with broader efforts to curb Iran's regional influence.

This includes an emphasis on blocking Iranian supply routes to Syria, which backs Hezbollah and Hamas against Israel. A regime change campaign in Syria might be part of Israel's strategy to defeat Iranian-backed troops in the area. Furthermore, there are allegations of clandestine US help for Turkey, which is deploying a Ukrainian-trained Turkish military to seize control of sections of Syria. This is compatible with

Turkey's objectives to exert authority and resist Kurdish dominance, which is backed by Saudi Arabia's call for broader regional power sharing.

Maintaining strategic operations from its borders, either directly or through proxies, aligns with Israel's larger objective of regional stability, which seeks to limit Iranian influence and weaken institutions opposed to Israeli interests. The interaction between US backing for Turkey, Saudi engagement in the Kurdish power alliance, and Israel's emphasis on Syria and Lebanon reflects a coordinated effort to shift the regional power balance, producing a situation that may indirectly provide Israel with "comfort." It attempts to undermine its rivals' supply lines and strategic positions (The Jerusalem Post, December 2024).

Israeli soldiers were never equipped for a lengthy conflict, and many of them were only good for three months, so they were not as tough as Hamas and Hezbollah, and they could not compete with them without American technology. While these Lebanese and Palestinians are also battling with automatic and traditional weapons, they are standing firm. Syria's geopolitical and strategic relevance becomes apparent when seen on a global scale. The strategic connection between Iran and Hezbollah made possible via a land bridge through Iraq and Syria, is critical to Iranian

backing for Hezbollah, which is a significant factor in stopping Israel from realizing its objective of a "Greater Israel."

This land connection is critical for Hezbollah to resupply and continue its activities, especially as it poses a danger to Israel. Without this connection, Iran's capacity to finance Hezbollah—and hence its strategic influence in Lebanon—would be severely limited. Breaking this bridge would need striking Syria or Iraq. Disrupting Syria, particularly through regime change, would be one method to cut off this critical relationship, limiting Iran's ability to fund Hezbollah. The US, Israeli, and Turkish interventions in the Syrian crisis might be viewed as part of a larger effort to weaken Iran's regional capabilities.

Syria, under Assad, became a focal point for exploiting these fault lines, particularly because Assad's ruthless administration and reliance on Iranian and Hezbollah assistance left it open to outsider influence (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). And now that Hamas and Hezbollah's top leadership has been slain in Israeli attacks, it will take decades for them to recover. The truce in the Lebanon-Israel border dispute suggests that Hezbollah is unprepared for future military escalation.

While the West, notably the United States and its allies, may have recognized Syria's strategic importance, it is failing to resist the rising influence of groups like HTS, which was founded on Al-Qaeda and ISIS affiliations.

The transformation of HTS from a covert terrorist organization to a more visible force, shielded from US counterterrorism operations, implies that the US and its allies have permitted these organizations to play a role in undermining the Assad regime to safeguard Israel's regional interests. Furthermore, such an aggressive movement is impossible without international intervention, as neighboring countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United States, as well as other emerging interest groups—Russia, Iran, the United States, Israel, and Turkey—are all now involved in a larger strategic game.

It is feasible to partition Syria into five sections, but this will be difficult since forcefully uniting these five regions may result in terrorism and the formation of new terrorist organizations. Finally, military maneuvers and diplomatic connections to preserve Israel's interests in restricting Iran's reach would help Greater Israel achieve its objectives. The current situation in Syria is complex. While concerns about the government's reliance on external powers persist,

consistent collaboration between Saudi Arabia and Turkey could potentially address challenges.

The previous government, by putting the veneer of socialism over nationalism, kept 80% of the population represented by a minority of 20%. We have seen the results.

Russia has a vested interest in defending Bashar al-Assad against American forces in the Middle East.

The Middle East and the Future of the Kurds

By Syed Salman Mehdi

(Originally Published February 24, 2025 – HumSub)

A Kurdish farmer once said, "Our homeland is the mountains." This cleaves one's heart and mind to the memories and agony that the Kurdish people, as a nation distributed all over some of the most turbulent regions in the world, have suffered. As Turkish airstrikes target Kurdish strongholds in Syria and Iraq, the Kurds find themselves again embroiled in the grand chess game. As Syria is at war and a new balance of forces is coming to the fore, the fate of the Kurds is left to the imagination at best.

Promises Made, Promises Broken

The Kurdish cause is one full of broken hopes. The Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 set up a Kurdish state. However, this hope went down the drain only three years later with the Treaty of Lausanne, which scattered the Kurds into Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. The Kurds are the largest nation without a state, with a population exceeding 30 million, but their role in the geopolitics of the Middle East is still crucial. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is semi-autonomous in Iraq because of these oil reserves. On the contrary, the political and diplomatic potency of the KRG is often

sabotaged by a longstanding feud between its two major political parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

> Meanwhile, Kurdish forces with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) have been instrumental in the defeat of ISIS. But the victory was not without cost. The U.S. support of the SDF had angered Turkey, whose longstanding concern is that the SDF shares links with the PKK, which Turkey and several other countries consider a terrorist group. Turkey's incursions have compounded the problems in this already volatile region.

Diverse Identities

The Kurdish people share a common language and history but are very different in culture and religion. While the majority of the Kurds seem to be Sunni Muslims, significant Yazidi, Christian, and Yarsani communities exist. This diversity is both a blessing and a curse, as foreigners often manipulate it to create friction. One of the most enduring examples of this has been the genocide of the Yazidis at the hands of ISIS, exemplifying how fragile the social standing of the minorities in the Kurdish society is.

> Such division, such as oppression, in this case, is Kurdish unity. The buck is passed first to the Iranian

and then to Saudi machinations. The Saudi support for Kurdish self-rule is a measure to counter Iran's influence, whereas Iran's purpose is to crush Kurdish revolts within her borders mercilessly.

Caught Between Superpowers

Suffering and blessing equally describe the Kurds due to their geography. Their land is rich in oil and is situated at a key point where trade routes connecting the Middle East, Europe, and Central Asia intersect. This makes them valuable to superpowers but also poses challenges.

The United States has strengthened its alliance with the Kurdish people, yet this partnership appears to be primarily self-serving. This is clear from 2019, when the U.S. broke its promises of support when it allowed the conflict to occur, leaving the U.S.-controlled region fraught with Turkish involvement.

In contrast, Russia's approach is different. It showed support for Turkey while facilitated discussions between the Kurds and Assad. This strategy benefited Russia as it improved its influence and hindered Kurdish aspirations for independence. Meanwhile, both Saudi Arabia and Iran leverage the discontent of local Islamic groups to further their agendas in the region.

A Price Paid in Blood

For the Kurds, the price of a nation is high, marked by lost lives, ruined homes, and dashed hopes. In Turkey, Kurdish leaders and advocates often face imprisonment due to strict anti-terror laws. In Syria, the ongoing conflict has shattered Kurdish areas, driving many into refugee shelters. Even in Iraq's Kurdistan, which is more stable, growth is hindered by corruption and ongoing disagreements with Baghdad concerning shared revenues.

> The challenges of 2024 have handiest deepened those struggles. As the new Turkiovernment in northern Syria consolidates strength, the Kurds face renewed threats to their cultural and territorial integrity. Yet their resilience shines through. Across Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran, Kurds keep asserting their identification and fighting for self-willpower.

A Call for Unity and Justice

The Kurds' path ahead relies upon overcoming inner divisions. A united front—rooted in shared cultural and political goals—should make their voice bigger worldwide. But the worldwide community needs to additionally step up, spotting the Kurds' proper to self-dedication and moving beyond the transactional alliances of the beyond.

For over a century, the Kurds have been betrayed by both nearby and global powers. The query now is whether or not history will repeat itself or if a new chapter will ultimately bring justice and recognition to these resilient human beings. The answer lies not only in the moves of countries but also in the Kurds' potential to navigate the complexities in their fragmented existence and seize the instant for solidarity and development.

Sources

1. "The Treaty of Sèvres and the Kurdish Question," Middle East Studies Journal.
2. "Stateless Nations: The Case of the Kurds," Global Policy Forum.
3. "Kurdish Autonomy in Iraq: Challenges and Opportunities," Carnegie Middle East Center.
4. "The Syrian Democratic Forces and the Fight Against ISIS," International Crisis Group.
5. "Turkey's Military Campaigns Against Kurdish Forces," Al-Monitor.
6. "The Yazidi Genocide: Lessons and Consequences," Human Rights Watch.
7. "Iran's Crackdown on Kurdish Protests," Amnesty International.
8. "U.S. Withdrawal from Syria: Implications for the Kurds," The Washington Institute.
9. "Russia's Role in the Kurdish Question," The Guardian.

10. “Kurdistan’s Economic Woes and Baghdad Relations,” Financial Times.

Targeting Chinese Nationals — Unrest in Baluchistan and the CPEC Challenge

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published February 1, 2025 – Global**Voices**)*

***Also translated in** : Español*

Chinese development projects are stirring tensions in Pakistan's Balochistan region

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a USD 62 billion infrastructure and energy development project which launched in 2015, has become a source of conflict and tension, particularly in the Balochistan province in Southern Pakistan. Despite its ambitious economic goals, the project faces persistent security challenges and has generated resentment in some local communities, leading to violence.

> Chinese nationals have been targeted, including the November 2024 Karachi airport attack and a shooting at a Karachi facility employing foreign workers. These incidents highlight deep-rooted grievances over perceived resource exploitation in the region, enforced disappearances, community neglect, and exclusion from decision-making processes.

> The China Index 2024 examined China's influence in 98 countries and ranked Pakistan as the country that is most exposed to China's influence globally.

CPEC hailed as a progress

The Pakistani government is advancing the CPEC, a 3,000-kilometre Chinese infrastructure project, which includes developing a deep-water port at Gwadar and establishing a road and rail network connecting the city to Xinjiang, China. As a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), this would provide a shortcut via the Gwadar port, boosting trade between Europe, the Middle East and China. The project also aims to address electricity shortages and help the country pivot from an agriculture-based to an industrial economic structure. However, the persistent violence has hampered progress and raised concerns about its long-term viability.

Security challenges and violent resistance

Pakistan has become particularly perilous for Chinese nationals, with 14 incidents which took 20 lives unfolding over the last year. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a major ethnonationalist militant group in the province, has been a regular offender. The BLA has long advocated autonomy for Balochistan, hoping to resolve issues over political marginalisation, economic exploitation, and

disputes over resource control. These rebel actions have intensified as part of a larger battle against the perceived tyranny of the Pakistani government and enforced disappearances. The government's Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances reports 2,752 active cases in the province as of January 2024, while Pakistan's government maintains that only about 50 people are missing.

> The assaults against Chinese workers are connected to the BLA's hostility to China's engagement in Balochistan's development projects, notably the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which locals believe is increasing their political and economic marginalisation.
>
> Despite promises of infrastructural development, reports from The Express Tribune and The Diplomat indicate that the CPEC has not benefitted the region's socio-economic dynamics. An October 2024 World Bank Report indicates that, while CPEC seeks to improve infrastructure in Balochistan, it has mostly expedited resource exploitation and delivered little benefit to neighbouring residents.

Activist Ambreen Baloch posted on X (formerly Twitter):

> This unrest, fuelled by a combination of local grievances and wider national and international

concerns, has caused instability in the region, which has hurt foreign investment.

According to a 2024 Balochistan Human Rights Commission report, Chinese corporations prioritise resource exploitation, environmental damage, and money over people's lives, while the Pakistani authorities continue to promote Chinese interests.

As Pakistan gets closer to China with the help of the CPEC initiatives, other countries in South Asia, like India, are becoming concerned and wary of China's growing influence in the region. Researcher Zeus Hans Mendez noted that regional animosities also enable militant activities in Balochistan.

Many in Balochistan commemorate the anniversary of mass graves discovered in the Khuzdar district on January 25, 2014, and this year's event was marred by internet shutdowns and other government repressions.

Journalist Basam Baloch posted on X about the shutdown:

China's concern about their workers

Chinese authorities have frequently criticised the security of their staff and projects in Pakistan. After the Karachi attack in November 2024, the Chinese Foreign Ministry voiced concern for Pakistan's security, heightening

diplomatic tensions as China advocates for more security measures. Although Pakistan has enhanced security around CPEC significant points, these measures were not enough to avoid the violence, indicating the glaring weakness in Pakistan's security apparatus. Because of Pakistan’s internal socio-security issues and the local situation, even with long-standing cooperation with China, it is difficult for the country to secure the living and investments of its own people as well as foreigners. This situation demoralises international investors and, in turn, raises doubts about Pakistan’s capability to maintain internal stability in such a complex political environment.

The future of CPEC

The people of the Balochistan region have been generally politically disenchanted and economically deprived for a long time. Sadly, for most of the Baloch people, the implementation of CPEC projects has only amplified a sense of marginalisation. According to a 2024 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report, the people of Balochistan are sceptical of CPEC and do not believe they are receiving positive economic outcomes from the project.

> Academics Hong Zhang and Ammar A. Malik suggested in a paper published in the Georgetown Journal of International Affairs in December 2024 that Pakistan and China should adopt a more open approach to

advance the CPEC. Acknowledging past shortcomings in Pakistan's security can help rebuild trust and foster dialogue. They also opined that expanding coordination mechanisms to include input from local stakeholders and experts is essential for fostering local ownership.

Impact of BRICS on the US Dollar

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published February 7, 2025 – **ParadigmShift**)*

BRICS aims to reduce reliance on the US dollar, driven by geopolitical tensions and economic sovereignty. While de-dollarization efforts have gained traction, structural challenges, coordination issues, and the dollar's entrenched global dominance make a full shift unlikely in the near future.

> With attempts by other currencies, such as the Euro or the Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) of the International Monetary Fund, to challenge its hegemony failing, the US dollar has remained the dominant global currency since the Bretton Woods agreement following World War II. However, with the rise of BRICS, the dollar may have a turbulent future up ahead.
>
> A world without the dominance of the US dollar in global international trade represents an alternate reality that could materialize soon. Emerging economies are uniting to transform what was previously impossible as they progress toward breaking the status quo. Following the recent BRICS bloc expansion, which added Saudi Arabia, Iran, the UAE, and Egypt to its membership, speculation has risen

about how the bloc can overcome US dollar hegemony in international financial trades. As BRICS positions itself as an alternative to Western-led economic structures, the question arises: Can they successfully de-dollarise? The shift brings both advantages and disadvantages to which entities?

Why BRICS Wants to Challenge the US Dollar

Rising geopolitical tensions, notably US sanctions on countries like Russia and Iran, have exacerbated the desire for financial independence. By lessening their reliance on the dollar, BRICS countries might avoid the severe effects of Western sanctions and gain greater control over their economic future.

For decades, the dollar has established dominance as the global reserve currency because of transparency, stability, and market dynamics in American financial sectors. The extensive usage of the dollar currency subjects macroeconomic systems to various potential dangers. The combination of higher U.S. interest rates, strengthening dollar exchange rates, and sanctions threats has created severe financial challenges for developing nations. Russia and China are leading the effort to break away from dollar dependency because both countries receive the harshest impact from US economic restrictions. BRICS nations discover in dollar

independence a framework to evade global financial dangers while asserting control in monetary institutions.

Who Stands to Benefit?

The move toward currency independence will provide valuable advantages to selected nations in the BRICS group and other emerging economies. Economic sovereignty improves directly through de-dollarization strategies that serve China and Russia to reduce Western restrictions. Some of these countries actively pursue currency-based trading practices between their nations. Saudi Arabia and the UAE's cost-controlled oil supplies lead these nations to seek alternatives to minimize their exposure to oil market characteristics dependent on the US dollar.

Through trade agreements using its rupee, India is reaching out to Malaysia and the UAE to amplify global usage of its currency. Local currencies within emerging markets show benefit potential due to their ability to reduce risks, minimize transaction costs, and foster stronger commercial partnerships with neighbouring countries. The BRICS states need to develop an effective system to establish this payment framework while handling the substantial technological barrier.

China and Russia have already begun trading in their respective currencies. A recent agreement established a long-term currency exchange to avoid the dollar in energy trading. Similarly, India has promoted currency-based trade with Malaysia and the United Arab Emirates to expand the use of the Indian rupee.

Who Could Lose?

The US dollar accounts for over 60% of global reserves and over 80% of international trade. A loss in this supremacy would significantly influence the United States' capacity to finance its debt at lower interest rates, perhaps leading to more significant borrowing costs domestically.

The United States faces the greatest risks from an effective BRICS-led de-dollarization movement. Because of its reserve asset status, the United States worldwide influence declines when the dollar is used less frequently. Diminished dollar use worldwide would increase domestic borrowing expenses because the U.S. government would lose its capability to subsidize deficits via cheap dollar funding.

The transition to international currencies poses risks to BRICS nations with weaker economic strength unless they have sufficient financial stability. These nations risk experiencing increased market volatility and a

decline in investor confidence due to their currencies' inability to remain stable compared to the US dollar.

Why Dropping the Dollar is Not Easy

The plans of BRICS to diminish the dollar's dominant role face strong obstacles. Due to its great depth, transparency, and liquidity, the U.S. financial system functions as the world's most stable reserve asset when crises strike. World trade through the dollar exceeds BRICS currencies by nearly 84 percentage points since the dollar dominates over 84% of global commerce. Still, BRICS currencies participate in small percentages of international payments and transactions, according to a Geopolitical Economy Report.

> The BRICS nations face additional difficulties because they lack sufficient partnership coordination. China acts to internationalize its renminbi (1 Chinese Yuan equals 38.51 Pakistani Rupee), yet BRICS members are concerned about China's power in the alliance. The different economic frameworks and strategic priorities make BRICS partners unable to develop common standards toward de-dollarization. Implementing shared reserve currencies or digital payment systems faces exceptional challenges because the bloc is struggling to build the required mutual trust.

> While BRICS nations have proposed blockchain-based digital currencies, such as mBridge technology, for cross-border payments, their implementation is still in its early phases. Developing the infrastructure to enable such systems across different nations is a huge challenge.

What Lies Ahead?

Even though BRICS suggested ideas about a gold-backed currency and blockchain-based payment systems, they exist at an experimental level and have not moved beyond theory. The worldwide implementation of mBridge technology for digital cross-border payments will require multiple years of development. The dollar maintains its global financial leadership, which shows no signs of loosening in the near future. A multisided economic structure becomes more plausible as BRICS nations work systematically to advance local payment systems while reducing their connection to Western financial frameworks.

> The United States and other Western nations are unlikely to embrace a successful BRICS-led de-dollarization effort. In reaction, we may see trade wars, additional sanctions, or other economic measures to maintain the dollar's dominance.

Conclusion

The BRICS nations pushing to break the dollar hegemony draw from genuine principles about commanding their economies alongside geopolitical advantages. The obstacles of structural challenges coupled with different national priorities and marketplace faith in U.S. financial stability create extensive barriers against de-dollarization. The current steps of BRICS nations today might determine how the worldwide economic order will reshape itself during subsequent decades despite the dollar maintaining its position as the dominant currency.

> While the BRICS' campaign for de-dollarization confronts enormous structural and political challenges, partial success in some areas, such as energy or bilateral trade deals, has the potential to change the balance of global financial power. Over the next decades, a more multipolar economic structure may emerge, even if the dollar's supremacy stays uncontested in the short term.

Pakistan — A Turning Point in Pak-US Relations

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published April 8, 2025 – **ParadigmShift**)*

On April 2, 2025, President Donald Trump announced a 29% tariff on Pakistani imports as part of a protectionist trade agenda called the "Fair and Reciprocal Plan." This move, aimed at correcting what Trump sees as an unfair trade imbalance, poses significant risks for Pakistan. The already strained US-Pakistan relationship could worsen as Pakistan navigates economic pressures, potential retaliatory measures, and the need to diversify its export markets.

> On April 2, 2025, US President Donald Trump announced new reciprocal tariffs, including a hefty 29% tax on Pakistani merchandise imports. This new scheme was part of Trump's "Fair and Reciprocal Plan," popularly known as "Liberation Day" in US trade policy, for which the American president's administration has been showing a dramatic escalation of the protectionist agenda.
>
> For Pakistan, a country heavily dependent on the US as a key trading partner, this move could upend economic dynamics and further strain an already complicated bilateral relationship. As the dust settles on this daring

policy shift, the implications for Pak-US relations are profound, multifaceted, and potentially transformative.

The Trump Tariffs Announcement: A Strategic Blow

Trump's imposition of a 29% tariff on imports from Pakistan is a direct response to what he considers an unfair trade imbalance. In the course of announcing the tariffs, he referenced the 58% tariff that Pakistan imposes on imports from America as justification for this countermeasure, arguing that such imbalances have long placed the US economy at a disadvantage. This tariff, effective April 9, 2025, will also impose an additional burden on Pakistan as it completes its journey from a universal 10% tariff that begins on April 5. In 2024, bilateral commerce is estimated at $7.3 billion and will set the stage—with $5.1 billion ringing up for Pakistani exports to the US. In turn, the stakes are high.

> The textile sector constitutes about 80% of the Pakistani export basket to the US. The new tariff threatens to cut Pakistani textile exports by $1-2 billion, a severe toll on an already stressed economy that faces huge structural problems, energy costs, and limited export platforms. The immediate economic impact could include loss of jobs in the textile sector, depreciation of the rupee, and a higher trade deficit,

further worsening financial vulnerabilities for Pakistan, especially when it needs $26 billion for external financing for FY25.

Economic Ripples of the New Tariffs: Beyond the Numbers

In fact, nearly 19% of Pakistan's total exports in the first half of FY25 (July to December 2024) were directed towards it. The United States is indeed a significant market for Pakistan's exports. As a result, American importers work out costs. They might even switch to alternative suppliers like Indian, Bangladeshi, or Vietnamese suppliers—countries that have tried to benefit from trade diversions and US-China tariff wars. For example, during Trump's first term, Indian and Bangladeshi exports to the US increased by 39% and 50% by the end of his second term, respectively, while Pakistani exports dropped by 3%. If this is repeated, Pakistan's global competitiveness will really take a hit.

The tariffs also have the potential to alter Pakistan's import dynamics further. Consequently, a stronger dollar, which boosts the US economy due to trade policies initiated by Trump, lowers the global pricing of commodities, making imports in Pakistan cheaper. However, shadowing this glimmer of hope stands with the possibility of tit-for-tat retaliation or reduced demand in the US market. The gains could, of course,

be nullified. The pressure on the Pakistani government to stabilize its economy would increase still further; it would have to pivot quickly towards new markets and lower production costs on short notice, negotiating trade concessions in some cases to clear up the haziness of the hell.

Pak-US Relations: A Fragile Bond Tested

Tariffs are being imposed in a very fragile state of relations between Pakistan and the US. This partnership has oscillated from cooperation to contention, from strategic alignment (especially during the Cold War and post-9/11) to periods of distrust (when issues of Afghanistan and counterterrorism policies matured). In recent years, American military and economic aid tapered off: Pakistan is on track to receive a mere $21 million in budgeted USAID grants for FY25 and so on to those external needs. The decision on tariffs compounds the strain, announcing an apparent shift from diplomatic engagement toward economic confrontation.

Pakistan should respond. Former Ambassador Maleeha Lodhi was adamant that export performance hinges on reforms at home rather than trading tweaks abroad, urging Islamabad to diversify its market and broaden its export base. However, the political response might be a defiant stand. If Pakistan decides upon retaliatory

tariffs – a decision mostly inhibited due to limited scope for leverage – it could exacerbate issues, but the retaliatory measure seems unlikely considering the disparity in trade dependence. Perhaps Pakistan would mold the diplomatic channel for getting an exemption or shift to phased implementation, using its leverage over South Asia as well as on regional issues like counterterrorism.

The US, for one, might see tariffs as a bargaining chip. The Trump administration linked trade policies with larger agendas, for instance, countering illegal immigration and drug trafficking (like fentanyl). However, Pakistan is less embroiled in these issues than Mexico or China. Both parties might, however, see tariffs as a way to leverage Pakistan toward greater alignment with US strategic interests, thereby reviving talks on security cooperation or regional stability for economic relief.

Broader Implications: A Global Trade War Looms

It is not Pakistan, of course, that bears the Trump tariff onslaught alone: around sixty other nations, with rates going as high as 49% for some countries, are covered under the policy. Also included are behemoths such as China, which has an effective 54%, and the European Union at 25%. Thus, this global increase could lead to a trade war, with

reverberations that could complicate Pakistan's position even further. As big international players such as China and the EU would retaliate – the former having already pledged countermeasures – global supply chains would likely fragment. Pakistan would probably be caught on the wrong side, attempting to adapt to shifting trade dynamics.

> The impact of tariffs goes beyond Pak-US relations; they signify a paradigm shift in these traditional alliances to something more transactional and America-first. Though the dominant economic power, the US would shun partners like Pakistan with its unilateral actions, tempting them to join a different bloc such as China's Belt and Road Initiative. Because of that, Pakistan – the key player in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – would probably want to deepen this partnership to compensate for the losses incurred by closing its market in the United States and perhaps transform its geopolitical orientation as well.

The Path Forward: Challenges and Opportunities

For Pakistan, it is both a crisis and an opportunity for tariffs. The immediate issue, however, is economic cushioning—maybe a "Global Trade Branding Initiative" promoting exports to untapped markets in Africa or Southeast Asia, as some analysts have suggested. Within the country, measures to decrease production costs, develop decent

infrastructures, and possibly impose minimum quality standards could enhance competitiveness. From a diplomatic point of view, Pakistan should ensure that it sails through this storm very pragmatically, stressing its economic needs against its strategic interests.

> These tariffs are a measure of Trump's enthusiasm for protectionism, and their success will depend on implementation. If they do not deliver sufficient manufacturing gains or provoke swift retaliation, the policy could backfire and damage US credibility and economic stability. As far as Pakistan-U.S. relations are concerned, tariffs can potentially test a partnership that has withstood the test of time throughout decades of stormy history. Navigating such a situation for Pakistan will require a full understanding of both its economic problems and the commitments that it has to other global trade organizations like the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Historic Tariffs – A Defining Moment

Trump's 29% tariff on Pakistan is not just an economic policy—it is a geopolitical statement. For Pak-US relations, it marks a crossroads that compels nations to redefine the terms under which they might be moving into a time of uncertainty. While Pakistan prepares for the aftershock and the US brass-knuckles its trade agenda, the coming months

will tell if this money move would strengthen America's hand or fracture a fragile alliance. One thing is clear: the echoes of "Liberation Day" will be heard far beyond the confines of the White House Rose Garden in shaping the future of Pak-US ties in ways that neither can fully predict.

Part IV

The Digital and Economic Frontiers

Comparing the Sugarcane Production of Pakistan with the Global Leaders

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published December 26, 2024 – **ParadigmShift**)*

Sugarcane, a vital crop cultivated in over 125 countries, holds immense global significance as a feedstock for sugar, ethanol, and bioenergy. While Brazil leads the industry with high yields, advanced technologies, and efficient by-product utilization, Pakistan lags due to outdated machinery, low yields, and water mismanagement. Despite its climatic suitability and vast labor force, Pakistan has a long way to go when it comes to maximizing its sugarcane production. By learning from top producers like Brazil, India, and Thailand, Pakistan can modernize its practices, enhance exports, and maximize the potential of its sugarcane by-products.

> Sugarcane is a crop of international significance cultivated in over one hundred and twenty-five countries. Sugarcane is the primary feedstock for several products, such as sugar, bio-energy, or ethanol. When it comes to sugarcane production, Pakistan has a disadvantage because its industry has several weaknesses. Analysing Pakistan against the other lead sugarcane industries, namely Brazil, India, China, and

Thailand, offers strengths, weaknesses, and prospects for Pakistani improvement in the sugarcane areas.

Top Producers in the Global Sugarcane Industry

Brazil

Currently, Brazil leads the production of sugarcane, which accounts for 40% of the world's sugar. In addition to sugar, it boasts an industry of advanced bioethanol borne out of the country's biofuels sector. Brazilian sugar mills are mostly capitalized, and the country tends to use bagasse, the residual sugarcane, for energy generation.

India

The second-largest producer, India, relies on its own demand and consumption more than any other country in the world. However, problems with the lack of efficiency and government bureaucracy still hinder its development in the global sugar market. Yet, India maintains its strong market position and is striving to achieve technological advances in its production.

China

As the world's largest sugar consumer and increasing producer of ethanol as part of its bioenergy plan, China is emerging as a significant player in the sugarcane sector.

Thailand

As a leading exporter of sugar and sugar by-products, Thailand has several strengths due to its efficient and quality sugar production. Its large-scale production technology and export-focused development strategies place it in a strong position in world markets.

Pakistan

Among the ten leading producers of sugarcane, Pakistan faces issues with fairly high production costs, old milling technologies, and improper water utilization. The country uses sugar mostly for its internal consumption and has limited ability to challenge international producers, especially in exporting this product.

Production Efficiency

Brazil leads in yield per hectare, producing 80-90 tonnes of sugarcane per hectare, far surpassing Pakistan's 50-60 tonnes per hectare. This gap gives a guess about the high level of mechanization and effective farming practices in Brazil. Other countries such as India and Thailand also

produce a higher yield per hectare than Pakistan; only that their figures are not as high as Brazil's.

Export Contribution

Brazil and Thailand produce 50 percent of the total sugar export, though Pakistan has export potential, but the emphasis is on local consumption. Pakistan's sugar market is primarily geared towards fulfilling local demand, leaving little surplus for export.

Technological Adoption

Developed nations such as Brazil and Australia are utilizing cutting-edge technologies, including precision farming, automated systems, and advanced irrigation practices, which put them ahead of Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan still uses traditional practices for the production of sugarcane, particularly for farming and milling, which restrain yielding capacity.

Sugarcane Production in Pakistan

Strengths

Climatic Suitability: Once again, Pakistan has a constructive climate for most of the crops in specific options, such as Punjab & Sindh, which is the mass-

producing land of sugarcane. These regions wash with a lot of sunshine and moderate temperatures in which they can grow their sugarcane.

Labour Force: The sugarcane industry in Pakistan has a vast rural labor force involved, right from farming to value addition to ancillary services. This, if updated, holds great potential for growth.

Land Availability: For sugarcane development, Pakistan has a large capacity of cultivable land that can be used for expanding this crop. Still, this potential is possible to achieve only in the case of eliminating the inefficiencies in the production chain.

Weaknesses

Low Yield per Hectare: Pakistan's per-hectare yields are far below the world's best producers, like Brazil, which gives 80-90 tonnes of sugarcane per hectare. Pakistan still has low yields at 50–60 qtls per hectare, showing that there is still much improvement that needs to be made in farming practices.

Water Management: Low yielding is another problem in Pakistan due to its reliance on aged canal irrigation systems and orders utilization of water supplies. This is true given the high incidence of water wastage,

especially at a time when water supply is becoming a scarce resource in the region.

Outdated Machinery: Energy losses exist in the sugar mills of Pakistan as most of them make use of outdated machinery. This inefficiency leads to an increase in expenses and, consequently, a decrease in revenues for mill owners.

Over-reliance on Subsidies: The overall market of the sugar industry in the context of Pakistan totally relies on subsidies from the government. These subsidies interfere with the market, thus hindering the sugar mills from reinvesting in this area and boosting modernization and consequently efficiency.

Products Derived from Sugarcane

Sugar

As a result, Pakistan makes sugar mainly for its population's consumption but is not competitive in the international market for this product. In contrast, Brazil generates sugar with way less cost through mechanisation and best practices. Thai companies particularly excel in their production method and exportation of sugar since Thailand is a leading exporter of the product.

Molasses

High on the list of exported goods is molasses, which is a by-product of sugaring and is usually shipped in its raw form by Pakistan without much refinement. This leads to the creation of a gap where valuable addition is not made to the product. On the other hand, Brazil uses most of its molasses to produce ethanol, which is advantageous to Brazil since it enhances its energy security and decreases vulnerability to fossil fuels.

Bagasse

Cane trash, or bagasse, which is another biomass available from sugarcane, has great potential for bioenergy production. Pakistan, in contrast, preserves a very low figure of using bagasse in its efficient ways, like power generation, which is seen in countries like Brazil and India and even in paper-making.

Chemicals

Currently, there are few chemical processing plants, exclusively for extracting the valuable chemicals present in sugarcane products. Firms in countries such as India and the United States have, however, evolved industries that obtain useful products like citric acid and acetic acid from sugarcane. This sector is still in its infancy in Pakistan.

Fertilizers

Press mud, another raw material arising from sugar mills and which can be used to manufacture organic fertilizers, has not been exploited in Pakistan to its full potential. Sugar production industries in well-developed countries like Brazil and Australia have proper systems to utilize all by-products, including fertilizer, which are helpful to improve soil condition and also lessen the effect on the environment.

Geopolitics of Solar Energy in China

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published September 3, 2025 – **ParadigmShift**)*

China has emerged as the global leader in solar energy through large-scale manufacturing, government support, and international projects. Its dominance drives down costs worldwide but sparks geopolitical tensions over supply chain dependence and human rights concerns. Despite record solar growth, China's continued reliance on coal creates a dual energy reality that complicates global climate goals.

> Solar power has seen a fleet expansion in China under desert projects and the Qinghai Plateau as the plans are transformed into plight. This may sound far-fetched, but it is China's reality: A bold ride into solar power. The world's power in solar manufacturing and multifaceted installation is China, reducing the expenditure and increasing the momentum of moving toward cleaner power. The increase is, however, marred by hitches such as geopolitical tensions, as well as the fact that they still heavily rely on coal. In the following article, we will look at how China managed to emerge as a solar superpower, the waves it is spreading across global supply chains, and what they are saying about the future of our planet. Introduced in easy language to

those who are not so familiar with the subject, the story of innovation, challenge, and the rise of solar energy in China is presented below.

The Foundations of China's Solar Power Supremacy

China's dominance in solar power didn't happen overnight; it's the result of clever government strategies, enormous manufacturing muscle, and smart investments abroad. At the heart of it all are national policies that treat solar energy as a top priority. Through documents like the Five-Year Plans, the government offers generous subsidies—essentially financial boosts—to solar projects, along with guaranteed prices for the electricity they produce. Investors are attracted by these measures, which stimulate advancements in the development of solar panels that are more efficient and much cheaper to manufacture.

Then there's manufacturing might: China operates solar panel manufacturing on a scale never before seen, through tech-savvy power plants, automated production, and material delivery channels. In this way, it can produce top-quality panels at the lowest prices, smashing reductions worldwide and encouraging more countries to adopt solar. Inside China, strong local demand keeps things moving, thus, ongoing improvement.

Adding to this is China's outreach through projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), where it funds solar farms in places like Asia, Africa, and Europe. These efforts not only export Chinese tech but also build lasting partnerships, helping other nations meet their energy needs while boosting China's influence in the renewable sector.

The figures themselves would tell an elevating story: In 2023, China added an impressive 217 gigawatts (GW) to its solar capacity GW terms, power output enough to power over 200 million households. This was more than half the world's new solar additions and surpassed the total solar setup in the United States up to that point. By 2025, China's total solar capacity will have soared past 1000 GW, with massive farms sprouting in sunny western regions like Xinjiang and the Tibetan Plateau, and even innovative setups on coastal flats and deserts. All these positions China as the undisputed leader, transforming its own energy mix and making renewables more accessible globally.

Ripples Through Global Solar Power Supply Chains

China has a real impact on how and where people will buy and sell solar technology, and that includes the part of the solar value chain it has thoroughly dominated, 80% of the

total global production from key materials like polysilicon to finished panels, manufacturing solar energy so cheap that it speeds up their acceptance all around the world. Scale, government support, and some brilliant cost-cutting innovations can bring efficiency.

But all this dependence has begun to frighten some nations, particularly the US and Europe. In extreme cases, relying on one country's supplies for crucial technology could provide vulnerability in conflict or trade spats. Reports of hidden devices in some of the Chinese solar equipment, for instance, have raised the alarm about the potential to tamper with power grids.

There is also the human rights aspect. The Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act of the US has been active since 2022, which prohibits the entry of imports associated with potential forced labour in Xinjiang, a region known for polysilicon. This has led to the detention of solar shipments worth millions at US borders, therefore slowing down America's green energy rollout, since it relies heavily on China's supply for solar energy. The EU has similar worries and is imposing tariffs to safeguard local makers, in addition to thinking about bans on forced labour materials entering the region.

As a reaction, countries are diversifying. The US and the EU, among others, are investing heavily in

homegrown manufacturing, although in the near term, not even close to matching the competitive pricing that characterises Chinese suppliers. It's a balancing act: while China helps lower costs, it incites independence.

Geopolitical Shadows Cast by Solar Exports

With important decisions being taken at the international level that could influence and direct the course of clean energy into a possible monopoly or heaven in favour of China, solar exports are not simply a business. The BRI is seeing China send solar schemes abroad to developing regions and further cementing political and economic relationships in the process. So this could allow China to exert influence for its advancement in political and economic matters, allowing a country to be put into a position of reliance on Chinese financing and expertise.

With an 80% share of the market, China sets the agenda for worldwide discussions in clean energy, basking in the glory of climate savior. Solar deals in this place Middle East-are forging relationships in key energy hubs. But all this causes alarms to go off in the West since they feel encroached upon.

Thus, having collateral dependency on China could mean threats to regional stability and competition in the green energy field. The rise of solar in China is now

changing the dynamics of power, with opportunities combined with rivalry.

Juggling Solar Energy Boom and Coal Reliance

From the soaring solar story, the confusion of the energy picture for the years 2024 and 2025 emerges, as China continues to grapple with its coal habit. In 2024, with solar capacity exceeding 880 GW, this year alone saw 277 GW added, which was double that of the total in the US by mid-2025. Another 212 GW joined, allowing wind and solar, together, to surpass coal in capacity for the first time and account for one-quarter of electricity generation in China.

Yet coal remains the dominant fuel for reliability. In 2024, China granted approvals to 66.7 GW of new coal plants and started construction on 94.5 GW, the highest level in a decade. Still, coal satisfies nearly 60% of energy demand, with consumption up 1% this year, notwithstanding solar gains, and is used in industries beyond power. Imports were at a record high due to cheap global prices.

That duality has come from energy security considerations, but it will hinder climate objectives such as peaking emissions in 2030. Experts propose to stop new coal plants and change markets to favor

renewables. China's trajectory shows the tension between green ambition and practical reality.

Counter-Moves from India, the EU, and the US

The other powers are not standing idle. India, under its schemes "Make in India," is in a full swing to accelerate solar production, aiming at a hundred-gigawatt manufacturing capacity by the year 2025—up from 2.3 GW in 2014. Incentives aim for 500-gigawatt non-fossil energy by 2030, with an addition of 7.8 GW in early 2025, almost reaching a total installation of 90 GW. However, with imports from China still flowing, the increasing domestic capacity will help reduce dependence.

While the EU puts tariffs on Chinese panels from June 2025 and mandates a local production share by 2026, the solar industry would probably add up to about 83 GW a year by 2028, while 2025 would see an offset in gains versus keeping prices low.

The Inflation Reduction Act of the US is pouring in $369 billion for clean energy while adding 10.8 GW of solar in Q1 of 2025. Recent changes to incentives may speak to some controversies, but they propel manufacturing and jobs. These actions show a global response effort to secure the supply chain against the tide of China's pre-eminence.

Stakes for the Planet's Climate Ambitions

This solar boom in China may present a turning point in the fight against climate change by turning sunlight into a less costly and more popular alternative to fossils. This aids in cutting down emissions in the world, especially in less developed nations.

> However, in the face of massive coal consumption, it is shadowy: Its continued use offsets gains made, making it more complicated for China's 2030 and 2060 targets while also making decarbonisation more difficult and sluggish for the world.
>
> The risk of supply chain disruption from over-dependence on China demands diversification for resilience. India, the EU, and the US are stepping up, which is exactly what we need for a robust transition.
>
> In the end, China's surge presents a golden opportunity for climate pain, but it will depend on fossil phase-out and the establishment of diversified supply chains thereafter. The next decades will either define whether the rise in China will ensure a sustainable world or it will increase energy inequalities in the world.

Taiwan Powers AI — The Hardware Realignment

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published August 26, 2025 – **MODERNDIPLOMACY**)*

Innovative technologies, including artificial intelligence, have ceased to be a niche technology, becoming the mainstay of modern economies.

Innovative technologies, including artificial intelligence, have ceased to be a niche technology, becoming the mainstay of modern economies. Hyperscalers and enterprise artificial intelligence solutions, as well as data centers, rely on superior servers and chips, along with some integration operations. The centerpiece of this shift is Taiwan, the country that has been a global leader in the creation of servers and AI hardware but that has remained under the radar. The strains of geopolitics and vulnerability of supply chain networks are pushing the best manufacturers of Taiwan to shift their operations.

> An ever-increasing number of these companies are establishing factories and assembly lines in Mexico and the United States to satisfy the demand, mitigate the threats, and reach the needs to change the trade policies. This change cannot simply be a tale of

technology, but it is also a tale of international politics, tariffs, and the future of AI infrastructure.

Taiwan's Role in AI Manufacturing

Taiwan dominates production of the AI servers with over 80% of the global servers and an even bigger market share of AI-ready servers. This management has a history of several decades of experience in the concept of contract manufacturing and well-established partnerships with U.S. technology companies.

> The AI revolution, however, is catching up to the pace of demand that even traditional supply chains cannot fulfill. Amazon, Microsoft, and Google are pushing their Taiwanese suppliers to manufacture hardware nearer North America.
>
> What is motivating them is exemplified by the idea that they need faster delivery times, want to avoid interference at the level of customs and other trade-related issues, and need to deflect exposure to the bouts of trade disputes with China. Taiwanese firms have emerged with a dual responsibility and advantage: to speed up the size and scope in new locations without sacrificing accuracy and consistency.

Strategic Shift

Foxconn, which has a long history of making iPhones, has reinvented itself with an AI structure. Server and cloud products revenue topped the smartphone segment in 2025, amounting to 41% of the sales compared to 35% by the cell phones (Reuters). This shift is indicative of a low increase in the smartphone sector and a high demand in AI. Foxconn, which it has recently established on a massive scale in Guadalajara, Mexico, includes what it calls the largest facility anywhere to bundle Nvidia superchip Blackwell.

> Simultaneously, it is also adopting a dual-track approach, which entails launching the twin production lines in the United States. The strategy is a protection against tariff risk with the flexibility to be able to provide faster and stronger delivery to hyperscaler clients. This change does not mark a short-term adjustment but rather represents a long-term reprocessing of global electronics manufacturing agendas.

Quanta and Pegatron Follow Suit

Foxconn is not the only one to take such a step towards realigning. One of the largest server makers in the world, Quanta Computer has invested one billion dollars in Nuevo

León with the aim of creating additional capacity in AI server manufacturing. The geographical location of the region in proximity to Texas and the developed industrial infrastructure is also attractive in the scaled operations base.

> Pegatron, in its turn, said that the mass production of AI servers in Mexico will start in the third quarter of 2025. The company also has plans for larger complimentary facilities in the United States of America to fulfill much more stringent trade and regulatory needs.
>
> Both companies are moving toward hyperscaler customers that need quick installations of Blackwell-type systems. In a combination of these moves, the Taiwanese response makes it clear that a new era of hardware production has been realized, which focuses on diversification and resiliency in regions.

Wistron Expands in the U.S.

Foxconn, Quanta, and Pegatron remain focused on Mexico, but Wistron is moving directly to the United States. The company has planned an investment of 500 million dollars towards builds located in and around Dallas to assemble the new generation of AI servers developed by Nvidia.

The facility is projected to open in 12 to 15 months, ready to assist the epic $500 billion AI server deployment by Nvidia across the nation. The ruling highlights the significance of geographical balance in the chain of supply, especially with the growing tariffs and regulatory demands. The direct manufacturing in the United States makes Wistron compliant and gives customers the confidence. Meanwhile, the company can also use local incentives and access to differentiated sources of talent in Texas at the same time.

At the same time, its approach is in line with a newfound belief among businesses in Taiwan: diversification is not just recommended but a mandatory survival technique in the age of AI.

Financial Momentum and Rising Risks

These business decisions are supported by healthy financial reporting of the company. Giant manufacturing giant Foxconn experienced a rise in net profit of 27% in the second quarter of 2025, to US$1.48 billion, due to the demand of AI servers. In the third quarter, the AI-related revenue boom is projected to rise more than 170% compared to the previous quarter.

Other companies are also experiencing tremendous growth, with Wistron recording a growth of 92.7% and

Quanta a growth of 65.6% in the first seven months of 2025. These figures prove that AI is not a technological phenomenon but a structural change in the world economy.

However, there are still dangers. There could be an increase in tariffs on imports into Mexico, Canada, and even other friendly economies. The need to deal with fluctuations in currency, lack of water, and fluctuations in the power grid in Mexico also presents an operational and maintenance challenge. The future looks bright, but it does not lack challenges.

Government Initiatives and Policy Pressure

It is also a concern of governments to develop new AI hardware geography. The Taiwanese leadership has embarked on a project of 10 major AI infrastructures it plans to develop as the economy aims to achieve an economic production of 510 billion by 2040 through the use of advanced research, robotics, and quantum technology.

Citing concerns that shipments can be diverted to China, the U.S. government is getting tougher on export controls, going as far as installing GPS-like tracking devices in the AI chips themselves. Mexico, in turn, is also using quiet diplomacy to get tariff stays and Taiwan investment without infuriating China.

These policy measures demonstrate how AI hardware has become a national security issue in addition to a business development concern. The relationship between corporate strategy and government policy will become the key to whether North America could be a stable and competitive hub in AI manufacturing.

Broader Implications for the IT Industry

These developments have a number of implications for IT professionals and businesses throughout the world.

One is that procurement strategies have to consider changing sources of supply, with an increasing number of AI servers now being manufactured in Mexico or the U.S.

Second, compliance and transparency are increasingly important issues because chips and servers are subject to increasingly strict compliance and tracking requirements under export controls.

Third, integrating manufacturing has opened the possibility of new regional suppliers in power systems, cooling solutions, and logistics.

Lastly, the geopolitical aspect cannot be disregarded further: the businesses that are highly dependent on Chinese manufacture are threatened to experience

delays, tariffs, or outrageous restrictions out of the blue. The world IT community needs to embrace the flexibility, resilience, and proactive approach to supply chain risks.

Conclusion

Taiwan has been pivoting in North America, and this has been a huge movement in the current technological manufacturing. The moves started as a strategic adaptation to trade pressures but have now become an architectural overhaul in the AI hardware market. With Foxconn, Quanta, Pegatron, and Wistron bidding billions worth of investments in Mexico and the U.S., North America is fast turning into an important center of research and development pertaining to next-generation AI.

This change will, however, be sensitive to political bargaining and infrastructure preparedness and global competition. The takeaway of this message to IT professionals, policymakers, and business leaders is simple: AI is redefining what software and data are and the fundamentals of global supply chains to boot.

Concurrently, numerous nations, particularly in the Global Southern region, run the risk of lagging because of poor infrastructure, resources, and talent, as well as regulatory deficiencies. Unless there is a strategic move, technological divides might widen. To eliminate

this, countries ought to give preference to digital infrastructures, invest in training on AI, develop enabling policies, and pursue international cooperation. The inclusive nature of AI regulations can help them to grasp economic advantages by reducing the global inequalities.

Only time will tell whether this change in manufacturing is a lasting strength or unaffordable trial and error. The ability to respond to both opportunity and risk will ultimately determine how successful nations can be in the transformative AI era and how they can compete and become world leaders in technology.

Crypto Exchanges – Fueling Crime and Wars

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published March 4, 2025 – **ParadigmShift**)*

Given the nature of cryptocurrencies, their exchanges remain vulnerable to cyberattacks. These vulnerabilities have become ever so apparent owing to a number of high-profile cyber theft cases, costing billions of dollars in losses. The recent $1.5 billion Bybit breach is one such case that exposes the systemic flaws in wallet security. Criminals and terrorist groups exploit these inherent weaknesses and use techniques like blockchain mixers and privacy coins to launder money and finance their illegal activities.

> Digital wealth exists without traditional vault restrictions in the digital world. They decentralised network functions through cryptographic key protection rather than traditional storage systems. In the blockchain era, cryptocurrency exchange platforms (crypto exchanges) continue to pose the weakest point of defence despite strong decentralised security. Such financial hubs keep experiencing advanced cybercriminal activities that result in multibillion-dollar digital asset thefts, which devastate both investors and financial systems. The responsibility

along with the financial cost remains unclear in this situation.

The Rise of Crypto Exchanges and Their Vulnerabilities

Cryptocurrency exchanges operate as digital sites for users who conduct transactions involving virtual currencies. The minimal regulatory oversight that characterises these platforms attracts cybercriminals because they find such unregulated activities lucrative. Crypto exchange hijacks result in instant million-dollar breaches and sometimes billion-dollar losses.

> Crypto trading security depends on wallets, which include offline cold and online hot options. Hot wallet management of user fund reserves at exchanges creates the main security concern because these digital assets require online storage for liquidity purposes. Security systems encounter penetration from attackers who take advantage of trading platforms' necessity for online wallets through methods that include social engineering, malware attacks, and phishing attempts.

Three Notorious Crypto Exchange Heists

1. Mt. Gox (2014): The First Billion-dollar Crypto Theft

When Mt. Gox served as the biggest bitcoin exchange, it experienced a security breach that allowed hackers to steal 850,000 BTC with a market value estimated at $450 million during that period. The current dollar value of that stolen amount exceeds $50 billion. The attack originated from security practices that were dangerously insufficient, and poor management created a regulatory consequence.

2. Coincheck (2018): The Largest Crypto Heist Until 2022

Hackers stole $530 million worth of NEM tokens from Japanese exchange "Coincheck" due to its weak wallet security. The nature of NEM transactions created permanent losses since they could not be reversed after being processed. The incident necessitated Japan's financial regulators to increase their oversight of cryptocurrency companies.

3. FTX Collapse (2022): Fraud Meets Cybercrime

The FTX collapse involved embezzlement as its main scandal, but a $477 million unauthorised transaction occurred during its bankruptcy filing day. The case exposed threats from both external hackers and internal staff members fraudulently accessing crypto exchange systems.

The Bybit Hack: $1.5 Billion Lost in Minutes

The world's second-biggest cryptocurrency exchange, Bybit, underwent a $1.5 billion cyberattack on February 21, 2025, which experts now label as the largest-ever digital theft. An attack on wallet transactions occurred when hackers interfered with a control wallet transfer process between these two wallet systems and transferred 401,347 Ethereum tokens to unknown account addresses.

The hack exploited numerous security vulnerabilities:

- Compromised private keys in multi-signature wallets
- Manipulated wallet interfaces during fund transfers
- Potential insider participation or phishing that exposes security credentials

The incident led Bybit to temporarily restrict withdrawals, raising industry-wide concerns about exchange security.

How Stolen Crypto is Moved and Laundered

Criminals cleanse stolen cryptocurrencies through blockchain mixer services, including Tornado Cash, which functions to hide the trail of their funds. The privacy features in cryptocurrencies Monero and Zcash make authorities struggle to trace back transactions to their point of origin since these digital assets provide confidentiality through anonymity. Layering functions as an approach

through which stolen funds get transferred between multiple digital wallets.

> Stolen cryptocurrencies get traded on dark web markets using decentralised exchanges that perform token swaps without requiring any customer verification through Know Your Customer (KYC) procedures. Criminals steal cryptocurrency funds then transform them into digital cards and web shopping items and perform their transactions using encrypted applications such as Telegram and WhatsApp.

Terrorist Financing Through Crypto

Law enforcement, together with financial regulators, has been facing major hurdles when terrorist organisations operate through cryptocurrency to fund their criminal activities during recent years. Through methods that include social media crowdfunding, they flood their money into fake charities and NGOs while establishing shell companies as well as carrying out exchange hacks to wash their funds. Two types of transactions terrorists use are peer-to-peer (P2P) and dark web transactions because they enable secrecy along with directness.

> The privacy-focused Monero coin, together with other privacy coins, helps users achieve transaction traceability along with privacy enhancement, which

attacks traditional monitoring procedures. The growing use of cryptocurrencies by terrorist organisations demands that government institutions partner with financial institutions and technology companies to create security measures that protect the financial ecosystem.

Who Covers the Losses?

State insurance support does not extend to cryptocurrency exchanges because these digital platforms lack protection from government institutions. The exchange services Coinbase and Binance provide limited protection for hot wallet vulnerabilities, although they only extend partial refunds. Ben Zhou, Bybit's CEO, communicated to customers that user funds remained safe while he promised to restore losses through Bybit's company reserves. The financial resources of many exchanges fall short of covering such a monetary deficit. Almost all the assets taken through crypto thefts remain irretrievable to victims.

Future of Crypto Security: What's Next?

With exchange hacks becoming more sophisticated, the industry must evolve. Key steps include:

- Stronger multi-signature authentication to prevent unauthorised transactions.

- Mandatory cold storage policies for exchanges holding large reserves.
- Decentralised exchanges (DEXs) as an alternative to centralised platforms.

Blockchain forensics and bounties to track and recover stolen funds.

The cryptocurrency sector is constantly improving security solutions for asset protection while also maintaining confidence. Better multi-signature authentication techniques, uniform cold storage rules, and the adoption of DEXs while adding blockchain analytical tools can all help to improve bitcoin security. A system based on multi-signature authentication works with multiple signatures across different private keys thus preventing any one factor from causing a failure.

Cryptocurrency wallets stored in cold environments under cold storage policies function without network connections, which safeguards against hacking attempts. The decentralised exchange model brings two key strengths consisting of operational failure prevention and better user privacy. Blockchain forensics allows researchers to monitor stolen cash as well as determine who is responsible for hacking occurrences. As technology advances, organisations

must continually adapt and reinvent their security systems as exchange hackers get more adept.

Conclusion

The increasing adoption of cryptocurrency results in enhanced operational risks for security systems. The Bybit hack demonstrates that security remains an ongoing contest because hackers possess slight advantages over financial systems in the modern digital era. All users must stay alert due to the lack of bulletproof security standards implemented across cryptocurrency exchanges. To succeed in cryptocurrency transactions, users need to construct trustworthy relationships through continuous actions on each cryptocurrency block.

Digital Siege of Baluchistan

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published September 1, 2025 – **DISSIDENTVOICE**)*

To the people of Baluchistan, connectivity is not meant by scrolling through their social media or by undertaking a light entertainment. Internet access is tenuous at best, which – in one of the most poorly dealt with provinces in Pakistan – serves both as a lifeline to education, economic opportunity, and communication with the rest of the world. However, on 6 August 2025, that lifeline was immediately severed as the provincial government ordered a blanket block on mobile internet access in all of its 36 districts, saying that it would remain blocked until 31 August.

> This was not an extraordinary incident. Pakistan has developed an ominous reputation of normalising digital repression. In 2024 alone, internet access was terminated 18 times with a total of more than 9,700 hours of shutdowns, costing the national economies an estimated USD 1.62 billion. Pakistan has become one of the worst culprits in the world next to India and Ethiopia.

A Manufactured Silence

Supporters of these shutdowns argue that blocking internet access is necessary to protect national security and to prevent militant coordination. Contrary to what might be true, some of the deadliest attacks have been in the places already bereft of internet access.

> A question, then: assuming that militants can operate offline, what exactly does cutting the internet off to the rest of the population accomplish?
>
> Are these actions maintained in the interest of security or are they in the interest of power centers?
>
> Think of the timing. The inordinate closure of the government is also done around times of political sensitivities. There was a deliberate cell shutdown during the days of Muharram in July of 2024 in a number of districts. In July 2025, following a coordinated effort of insurgent groups to organize Operation Baam, the state reacted not by acting in transparent way, but with another communications blackout.

Everyday Lives, Interrupted

On the human side, the cost is high. Students have missed online classes, exams, and the status of online submission of online applications are uncertain. To the proprietors of

businesses, electronic banking and consumer interactions go down in one night. Journalists are not able to verify events, or report on time; hence, it has been termed by many as an intentional information blackout.

> In Panjgur, a young student of journalism recalled his 4 years of life without mobile internet, but this was only possible through an expensive landline PTCL connection. In Gwadar, Nafeesa Baloch, a climate activist, complained that she had missed important deadlines to fill out grants and had lost international partners due to the August blackout: “This did not merely happen inconveniently; it silenced us on our work.” It is a bitter irony. While the leaders of Pakistan are so proud to talk about digital innovations, whole communities have to live as if they had never seen the modern internet.

Defying Courts, Defying Citizens

Considerations of executive competence dominate even where the courts intervene. In July, the Baluchistan High Court ordered a partial restoring of internet service, but the government has continued the blackout irrespective of the order of the court. When a high court judgment can be blatantly disregarded, does a constitutional assurance of communication and expression have a quality anymore?

> Local coalitions, including the All Parties Kech grouping, have criticised curfews and internet cut-offs as an antipathetic step toward the people, an impediment to the supply of basic commodities and a gag order to representatives of people expressing differences with the state apparatus and its controlling corporations .

A Historical Continuum of Control

This is not a recent. On Pakistan Day in 2012, the mobile services were blocked throughout Baluchistan. In 2017, Dalbandin had six months of no mobile data). In more recent times, in 2024 during the general elections, they went again to silence a platform, X like they did to YouTube in 2010. The tendency is another pattern that can only be described as the reaching of the off switch by the state on the part of insecurity.

International Alarm, National Denial

Watchdogs of freedom of expression, including the UN Special Rapporteur himself, have criticised the repeated use of blackouts not only as an attack on liberties but also for their effect on the credibility of Pakistan in the international arena. Nevertheless, the authorities perpetuate it, despite realising the damage to Pakistan's

reputation. Pakistan is in need of foreign investment, yet its digital ecosystem is driven to its knees.

> What tone relay to investors about the stability of Pakistan's institutions?
>
> How can one present the country as a tech hub of the future when connectivity is not a right, but a privilege?

The Questions That Remain

If security is truly the objective, then why do militant attacks continue even in areas that are already disconnected from the internet?

What happens to democratic checks and balances, if court orders are not enforced?

When education, healthcare, journalism, and livelihoods are being disrupted, whose security is being given first priority?

Above all: when a government opposes and muzzles its citizens far more than it protects them, who is the government actually serving–the populace, itself, or other interest groups?

In Baluchistan, every outage is not merely a time out in communication–it is another brick in the wall of isolation

under duress. There is a danger that these emergency regulations would become a never ending reality of digital instability.

When the only infrastructure between a people and the rest of the world is a susceptible bridge of connectivity, how long before such a bridge falls entirely?

Part V

Towards a Just Tomorrow

India's Parliament Passes Landmark WAQF Amendment Bill After Heated Debate

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published April 7, 2025 – **DISSIDENTVOICE**)*

The Waqf (Amendment) Bill 2025 was passed after an intense debate for nearly 12 hours on April 4, at 2 a.m. This bill, which had been given the approval of the Lok Sabha, the lower house, just a day before, at 1 a.m. on April 3, brings about a sweeping change in the Waqf property laws-charitable trusts under Islamic law. Titled the Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency, and Development Act or "UMEED" meaning hope in Hindi, this bill has set off fierce contentions, with its proponents calling it a great transformative reform and critics arguing that it violates the rights of people under a veil of political activism.

> The passage of this historic legislation was celebrated by Prime Minister Modi on X, stating that it would mark a significant milestone for his government together with the abrogation of Article 370, the Citizenship Amendment Act, and the Ram Temple construction. Very grandly put, but the legislation is highly contentious and complicated in its purpose, consequences, and outlook on Waqf properties spread across 9.4 lakh acres across India, making them the

third-largest landholder in the country after Railways and Defence Forces.

What Is Waqf, and Why Does It Matter?

In the Islamic system of law, a Waqf is regarded as a charitable trust whereby an individual sets aside property-whether land, buildings, or other assets-for religious or social purposes. In its designation, the property is said to have been transferred to Allah so that it may be administered by a custodian (mutawalli) in fulfilment of specific purposes like the endowment of mosques, graveyards, or welfare activities. In India, this centuries-old practice has, however, been codified and regulated through various enactments starting from the Muslim Wakf Validating Act of 1913 to the Waqf Act of 1995, as amended in 2013. Presently 32 state Waqf Boards and a Central Waqf Council are in charge of these assets.

The scale of Waqf assets is indeed staggering: millions of properties, mosques, cemeteries, shops, and agricultural land. In theory, their income should be utilised for the education, healthcare, and welfare of the Muslim community. Mismanagement, corruption, and a poor revenue-generating capacity remained the catchwords for the schemes in practice-the last being about ₹163 crore a year as per the Sachar Committee Report in 2006. The report mentioned that if properly

managed, Waqf could have made 12,000 crore ($1.4 billion) today, establishing a chasm between what could be and what is the functioning by the government, which now claims to correct.

The Bill: Key Changes and Controversies

The Waqf (Amendment) Bill is intended to introduce radical reforms intended to modernise and centralise Waqf administration. Among its most controversial provisions:

Abolition of 'Waqf by User' and Section 40: It was often said that "Waqf by user" applies to properties that had been put to religious uses for very long periods, such as ancient mosques or graveyards, making them Waqf even in the absence of formal documentation. According to Section 40 of the 1995 Act, it was also possible for Waqf Boards to determine unilaterally whether a property was under their purview. The new bill does away with both provisions and makes it mandatory for district collectors to undertake surveys and verify claims, a move the government says will stem the tide of arbitrary land grabbing. Critics fear, though, that it could endanger myriad undocumented historical sites to litigation and reclamation.

Centralised Registration and Transparency: The bill obliges all Waqf properties to be listed on the

government portal within six months of its enactment, thereby promoting transparency. Disputes, which were previously adjudicated solely by Waqf Tribunals, can now be appealed in high courts, thus subject to the erstwhile arguments of ensuring justice, but critics say centralising control under the state.

Inclusion of Non-Muslims and Women: The bill proposes that in the Central Waqf Council (22 members) and state boards, aside from two Muslim women and representatives of Muslim communities (Pasmanda1), four and three non-Muslim members, respectively, should be included. The government suggests this is a progressive step since Waqf decisions affect non-Muslims as well. On the other hand, opposition leaders, such as AIMIM's Asaduddin Owaisi, argue that the diversity is not required for Hindu temple boards, thereby accusing the BJP of selective interference.

Inheritance Rights: A prohibition against Waqf dedications that disinherit daughters contributes towards gender equity. However, critics have noted the anomaly-the Hindu law on inheritance continues to allow fathers to discriminate in favour of their sons, and no reforms have been made to address this.

Limitation Law: Property disputes will be subject to a limitation period, thereby precluding claims more than

> "x" years after the event. While this purportedly hastens the wheels of justice, it has evoked opposition, such as by Abhishek Manu Singhvi, who warns that lingering unresolved cases might legitimise illegal encroachments under the evil doctrine of "adverse possession."

The Debate: Polarization and Power Plays

Confusion and Vast Misdirection: The next step is to satisfy the Parliament's vagaries. In the Lok Sabha, 288 MPs voted for it and 232 against. The Rajya Sabha saw 128 votes for and 95 against. TDP and JD(U) are allies, while BJP got help from the YSRCP and BJD, which allowed free votes among their MPs to ensure the simple majority was achieved.

> Kiren Rijiju, the Minister of Minority Affairs, introduced the bill on April 2, citing "97 lakh petitions" from stakeholders as proof of public demand for one that would uplift poor Muslims and modernise the broken system. He charged Waqf Boards with misusing their powers to lay claims to properties such as that of Delhi's CGO Complex or land of a 1,500-year-old Tiruchendur temple in Tamil Nadu, aided on many occasions by past Congress governments.
>
> The substantive opposition came from Congress, DMK, and RJD. A. Raja of DMK stated the existing process

involving independent survey commissioners and civil procedure codes prevented arbitrary acquisitions and charged that the BJP was exaggerating the ills so that control could be gained via district collectors who lack the independence of earlier officials. Congress member Imran Pratapgarhi disproved all claims that Waqf Tribunals were unaccountable "religious panchayats," emphasising judicial scrutiny of their operations since the 1995 Act. Manoj Jha from RJD posed the question of how sites centuries old could have modern documentation and predicted a "mountain of litigation."

Owaisi and others posed a much graver question: the stripping of "Waqf by user" status and demands for paperwork could put historic properties on shaky ground, making them susceptible to takeovers by the government or corporations. They reminded them that of the 14,500 hectares of Waqf land in Uttar Pradesh, 14,000 hectares were recently declared state land, including old mosques and graveyards, a precedent they fear would become widespread.

A Watershed Moment—or a Polarising Ploy?

Crossing the divide, Modi's term resonates differently. For BJP, the bill is a stroke of genius, falling well into its agenda of uniformity and reform. His supporters contend that it

follows in the lines of Waqf modernisation of Muslim countries-transferring lands for public welfare. Rijiju assured that registered Waqf properties would not be touched, letting slide much-elaborated fears of retrospective actions.

But "Jai Shri Ram" chants resounded through parliament once the passage was done, with critics like Uddhav Thackeray branding it a conspiracy to adopt Waqf lands for crony capitalists. The opposition plans to challenge the bill in the Supreme Court, which cites the guarantee of Article 26 on religious autonomy and warns of increased communal tensions as the result of this bill.

The best test for the bill lies ahead yet. Will it streamline Waqf management and improve income back to Muslims, as the government claims? Or will it create polarisation, case-laden challenges, and space grabs as its detractors predict? As 99% of Waqf properties have already been digitised (per an affidavit by the government in 2020), whether such upheaval needs elimination is being debated. As India watches on, this UMEED Act, born of hope, may yet find whether it delivers progress or oozes deeper divides.

1 The term **Pasmanda** originates from Urdu, where "Pasmanda" literally refers to "those left behind." In the South Asian context, especially in India, it is

commonly used to describe marginalised Muslim communities who live below the poverty line and face significant social and economic disadvantages.

Stolen Democracy – Why Imran Khan Was Jailed

By Syed Salman Mehdi

*(Originally Published September 8, 2025 – **DISSIDENTVOICE**)*

The imprisonment of Imran Khan is now a subject occupying the ground and shifting the mood of Pakistan in reaction. With his party symbol taken away and being surrounded by hundreds of other lawsuits, Khan continues to dominate conversations at the market stalls, tea stalls, and social media feeds. For many, he is an icon of resistance against a system long branded as one that silences popular leaders—a picture that awakens echoes of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's fate. His supporters see him as a victim of political engineering and these very political constraints. An outright ban on visits to his family, detention of his allies, and exile of sympathetic journalists have only strengthened the very allegiance among his supporters. Far beneath the floods, economic hardships, and day-to-day life lingering in their heads is the name of Imran Khan, both as a grievance against the ruling elite and a rallying cry for hope. Hence, his incarceration metamorphosed into a reflection of Pakistan's truncated democracy, where public sympathy came into conflict with establishment revenge.

Stolen Verdict

The general elections exposed deep cracks in the democracy of Pakistan on February 8, 2024. Independent candidates joined Imran Khan's PTI who won the most seats, leaving PML-N and PPP behind. However, not a single party managed to carry the clear majority, further escalating political uncertainty. Allegations regarding the vote rigging and other irregularities occupied the whole post-election scenario. PTI leaders accused the Election Commission of manipulating the result by delaying the announcement while reports of interference in vote counting identified the denial of PTI's election symbol and thus painted in a picture of pre-election suppression.

> This controversy deepened when a divisional commissioner came up and confessed to fraud under duress from superiors before walking it back. These forces have manipulated the results of the elections but the findings have largely shown that the public is up against rejection of Pakistan's dynastic parties, coupled with the public's resentment of military interference in politics.

Trials of Power

The demise of Imran Khan is linked to a series of prominent cases. The leaked "cipher" which was published by The

Intercept, suggested that there was pressure from the U.S. for his ouster over his Russia-Ukraine policy, which subsequently landed him a 10-year sentence under the Official Secrets Act. Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi were also sentenced to seven years in the controversial Iddat case, which questioned the validity of their 2018 marriage, before they were acquitted on appeal in July 2024. He was also given a 14-year sentence on the Toshakhana wristwatch case involving gifts from foreign states. In a related inquiry, £190 million was allegedly diverted from property tycoon Malik Riaz to the Al-Qadir Trust linked to Khan and his wife, resulting in corruption charges. Such politically engineered cases, in the eyes of his supporters, have further exacerbated public grievances and reaffirmed his image as a persecuted leader.

Pakistan's Hybrid Power Structure

Pakistan manifests a hybrid power system of political order where a military establishment converges with dynastic families, capitalist elites, and technocrats, who would all be working together to keep control. The ex-army officers occupy such lofty positions in civilian offices and institutions like NADRA, PTA, and WAPDA. This certainly indicates that there is a lot of military penetration in civilian governance and policy-making.

> Major parties being politically dominated by families like the Sharifs and Bhuttos who together exert family connections to establish the political monopoly and hinder political competition in an ongoing rivalry. Meanwhile, bureaucrats and business elites align with military and political families, thus fortifying a resistant-to-change ecosystem. Such commodification of power produces civilian-military brackets, institutionalises elite capture, and perpetuates the fragile democratic order in Pakistan.

Exodus of Talent and Capital

Emigration from Pakistan continues at a very brisk rate till now after regime change involving Imran Khan. For instance, in 2023, 862,625 people migrated, a slight improvement over the figure of 832,339 in 2022; hence, a gradual outflow instead of a sudden spike (PIDE BEOE). The net migration figure is clearly negative, at -1.6 million for 2023 and -1.3 million for 2022; thus, it is more people going out than coming in Macrotrends.

> While remittances have continued to show resilience, even during the pandemic period, future growth remains uncertain because of a possible slowdown in migration or diversion away from conventional labour destinations GIDS Report. This consistent outflow of professionals, labour, and capital represents one of the

most grievous long-term losses for Pakistan and represents a debilitating drain on both talent and economic potential.

Deep State: Old Patterns, New Confrontations

Imran Khan's four-year tenure indeed signified a drastic shift away from decades-old deep state patterns in Pakistan, especially when it came to an absolute rejection of U.S. drone strikes. For two reasons: One, in Khan's government, there was no use of a drone on Pakistani soil, the first time since 2004. Unprecedented in its overt rejection of sovereignty, this act was Khan's attempt to often evidently show that he rejected any imposition on sovereignty. For years, Khan had been mobilising protests against drones, condemning civilian deaths and secret pacts by past governments.

Khan condemned Pakistan's military as having aided U.S. operations in Afghanistan, calling it a "slave war" that cost Pakistan 70,000 lives and billions of dollars in damages, openly shunning military establishment strategy to pursue Washington's objectives.

In the past, however, accusations on Pakistan's deep state have been persistent, accusing it of using non-state actors as instruments of proxy warfare in Afghanistan and Kashmir IDSA. It also facilitated the

proliferation of Saudi-funded madrassas, from the 1970s onward, embedding puritanical ideologies which have altered Pakistan's educational system and sectarian landscape.

Another dark shadow hung over the drug trade. The heroin trafficking routes during the Afghan jihad in the 1980s were reportedly protected by intelligence networks to finance their covert wars, as claimed by GISF. Reportedly, these networks then became modern-day militancy financed by narcotics connected to groups like the Taliban and the Haqqani's Global Initiative.

Perhaps this level of opacity still exists today. During $364 million worth of defence contracts between the U.S. firms and Pakistan, it was suggested that arms be redirected to Ukraine alone. At the same time, claims by President Zelensky in 2025 that mercenaries from Pakistan had fought in favour of Russia were firmly rejected by Islamabad as false and politically motivated.

For Khan supporters, this entire proxy warfare, ideological manipulation, illicit trades, and foreign appeasement went soberly against Khan's policy that placed sovereignty first. His open defiance of deep state's traditional alliances, coupled with his own zero-drone-strike record, is understood as an immediate

trigger for his downfall, that is, being punished in prison for going against deep-rooted interests.

Conclusion

The jailing of Imran Khan is all about much more than one man; it is the ultimate proof that the politics of Pakistan are hostages to a hybrid deep state—military overlords, dynastic families, capitalist cronies, and generals turned bureaucrats. For this reason, Khan was punished for refusing to bow down to the system: ending military drone strikes, opposing proxy wars, and exposing elite corruption. An insatiable addiction to foreign dictates, drug money, and Saudi influence has sustained a system whose output is a broken democracy, mass exodus of youth and captivity of the nation between sovereignty and servitude. Until this nexus is broken, every elected leader will remain disposable, and every citizen will remain expendable.

About the Author

Syed Salman Mehdi is an independent journalist, essayist, and analyst whose writings have appeared in leading international platforms such as *Global Voices, Dissident Voice, Modern Diplomacy, Paradigm Shift, CounterPunch, and Green Left Weekly.*

With a pen sharpened by truth and conviction, his works confront injustice, question false narratives, and expose the subtle mechanisms of modern oppression. His essays traverse the terrains of politics, morality, and human endurance, reflecting a restless intellect unafraid to challenge the powerful and defend the silenced.

For Salman, writing is not a profession but an act of resistance — a declaration that truth needs neither permission nor approval. His voice, shaped by struggle and contemplation, mirrors the very essence of Ruthless Might: the unyielding strength of conscience against the arrogance of power.

For more of his work:

🌐 muckrack.com/syed-salman-mehdi
🌐 linkedin.com/in/multithinker
✉ salmanmehdi128@gmail.com

> “He writes where silence begins to hurt.”